AN INTRODUCTION TO HINDU SYMBOLISM

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

ANYONE who studies Hindu scriptures is struck by the odd mixture of the highest philosophical doctrines on the one hand and crude fetish worship and myths on the other. And the most remarkable thing which strikes outsiders who have not studied these things deeply is how otherwise intelligent people can accept these things as a matter of course and even take part in ceremonies in which Divinity is worshipped in grotesque forms. You will find, for example, a professor of philosophy lecturing on Vedanta in a university and explaining to the students very carefully the subtle conception of Nirguna-Brahman. The same professor comes home and in the evening takes part most enthusiastically in die worship of Kali, the Goddess with a flaming sword and a garland of sculls round her neck. You find the same professor again, next day, offering Ganga water and *bel* leaves to an ellipsoid made of stone in a temple. And the strange thing about this religious life of the Hindus is that it does not occur to these people that there is any contradiction involved in their attitude to the many Gods whom they worship, sometimes in very strange forms.

Another aspect of the same phenomenon is the ready acceptance of the innumerable stories of different gods and goddesses in our scriptures, specially the Puranas, which are so popular among the masses. Many of these stories are absurd in the extreme, some of them are even revolting and insulting to our intelligence. And yet, not only illiterate and unintelligent people, but also educated and highly intelligent people, read the Puranas with great devotion and derive real spiritual sustenance and inspiration from them. When a learned Pandit (scholar) reads a colourful account of the wedding of Shiva and Sati with great devotion, sceptics might feel amused at his credulous attitude, but he does not see any absurdity in the apparently absurd story. He knows in his heart of hearts that he is reading an allegorical account of a great occult truth. The very absurdity of the story shows that it is not to be taken literally and hides a profound truth.

It is true that many common people among the Hindus take many of these things as literally true and this has led to the growth of superstitions and perverted religious ideas. But I do not think there are many people, even among those who are illiterate, in whose subconscious mind there is not a vague conviction that behind these apparently absurd stories there are hidden great spiritual truths even though they may not understand what they are. It is

this intuitive perception or conviction which is the basis of their faith and not lack of intelligence, or credulity or superstition, as is generally supposed.

A close and careful study of the Hindu scriptures should convince anybody who has some insight into these things that it is not only the Vedas, Upanishads, the philosophical works, and such other high class literature which are the repository of the highest philosophical and religious truths, but even popular literature like the Puranas contains, as an integral part of it, the highest wisdom though in a veiled form. In fact, it is this dilution of wisdom with stories and illustrations which has made it easily assimilable, and enabled it to survive the ravages of time and changing environment, and to be handed on from generation to generation almost intact. For one person who can study and understand the highly philosophical truths in their nakedness, there are a thousand who study them clothed in the popular form of stories, and that is how these truths have continued to influence and inspire the masses, generation after generation. And the fact that the wisdom and knowledge have and have been effective in keeping alive spiritual traditions and conceptions shows the wisdom of our Rishis (sages) who devised this popular method of spreading and transmitting ideas of great value to humanity. If our spiritual culture is to survive it is necessary that these truths and traditions be kept alive among the people as a whole and not be confined among a few erudite scholars.

What has been said above with regard to the presentation of spiritual ideals through stories holds good also with regard to the presentation of spiritual and philosophical concepts in the form of symbols. The deeper truths of spiritual life are really beyond the grasp of the lower mind and are matters of direct realization in the deeper states of consciousness. But a keen and trained intellect may be able to deal with these truths, partially and indirectly, in the form of philosophical conceptions and concepts. These intellectual interpretations can give a faint glimpse into the nature of these truths especially if the mind has been purified and the light of Buddhi illuminates it to some extent. But these purely intellectual conceptions are bound to be abstract and can be grasped only by people whose higher minds are well developed. The ordinary man finds it very difficult to understand them or to take any real interest in them.

Are the masses then to be deprived completely of the benefit of knowing these truths? The art of symbolism was created to enable the ordinary man to derive at least some advantage from these ideas, to keep alive his interest in them and thus make possible the transmission of these precious ideas from generation to generation as part of the general culture and heritage. A symbol is a concrete thing which every man can see and remember. If

he understands its inner significance well, the symbolic representation does not interfere with his understanding of the truth. On the other hand, it helps him to fix it more easily in his mind. If he does not understand the inner significance, he, at least, knows that it represents some inner truth and has, generally, a vague idea about it. He can thus maintain, at least, a superficial contact with the truth and derive some inspiration from it. Even the most learned philosopher can, at best, know the truth very vaguely as long as he has not realized it directly. Even if he takes the thing literally, which is hardly possible for any sane person, he carries in his mind a form which can be invested with life and meaning quite easily. In fact, it will be difficult to find an individual in India, in whose mind these symbols associated with Divine life are not associated in some degree with meaning and who does not feel more or less devotion towards them. We thus see that symbols and allegories may to a certain extent step down the truths of the higher life and may even debase them, but they keep them alive and thus enable the common people to derive some measure of inspiration from them.

Most of us do not realize what an important part symbolism plays in our life. Language through which we communicate ideas is purely symbolical in character. We assign certain meanings to words and then use these words as coins or counters for the communication of ideas. There is no natural relationship between words and the ideas for which they stand except when they are used for their sound effect in *Mantra Yoga*. When, for example, the word *prasannam* is used in the *dhyana-mantra* of Mahesha we use a sound for representing the state of *ananda* (bliss) in which He lives. When a smile is shown on His face in a picture we use a visual device for representing the same idea.

His expression of religious and philosophical ideas through symbols is not an art peculiar to Hinduism. It has been practised since times immemorial in many parts of the world but perhaps it has never been developed to such a degree or practised on such a wide scale as in Hinduism. It is a great pity that the study of this art has been completely neglected in modern times with the result that our ideas regarding religious and philosophical truths have become confused and a lot of superstition has crept lotto our life. This ignorance of the symbolism hidden especially behind the forms of religious worship is to a great extent responsible for the declining faith in our religious ideals and an increasing interest in materialistic pursuits. In our modern scientific age what one cannot explain, one is inclined to relegate to the realm of superstition and the modern educated Hindu is thus reduced to the necessity of either believing in these things blindly or ignoring them as products of fancy or superstition.

But decline in faith among the modern educated Hindu is not the only undesirable result of this lack of knowledge concerning the symbolical character of religious forms of worship and the religious lore of Hinduism. It has prevented the doctrines of Hindu religion receiving from the Western people the serious consideration which they deserve on account of their inherent reasonableness and highly philosophical character. It is true that Western scholars have given a lot of their time to the study of Hindu religion and done much to spread this knowledge among Western people. But they have done it in a purely academic spirit, regarding these things as relics of the phases through which the Hindu mind has passed in the past and to which it is clinging rather credulously in the present. They can study and record the customs of primitive tribes in the heart of Africa with the same care and the same detachment. For lack of the key to symbolism which lays open the inner meaning, they have not been able to take these things seriously as representing the truths of the inner life of the spirit based upon facts of experience of spiritually enlightened people.

Many devotional people are afraid to look into these things because they think that such a study will undermine their devotion. This is obviously a mistaken attitude. The truths hidden behind the symbols are so magnificent and of such deep import that devotion should become strengthened and not weakened on understanding the inner significance of the symbols. A new understanding dawns in our mind which not only illumines it and enriches our conception but also brings out a deeper and more intelligent kind of devotion. The understanding of the inner significance of the symbolic form does not deprive us of the form to which we may have become attached. It ensouls that form with a new life. This is a necessary step in our progressive realisation of the reality hidden behind the symbol within ourselves.

CHAPTER II

DEVIS AND DEVATAS AS POWERS AND FUNCTIONS OF THE ONE GOD

BEFORE we deal with the symbolism underlying the many forms in which the Hindu worships God, it is necessary to say a few words about the conception of Devis and Devatas in Hinduism. There is no aspect of Hinduism which is more misunderstood and misrepresented than the existence of a large number of forms, some of them grotesque, in which different people worship the Divine Being. People who are superficially acquainted with the basic conceptions which underlie Hindu religion and philosophy seriously believe that the Hindu worships innumerable gods and goddesses. Nothing is farther from the truth. It must be said however, that there is some justification for this gross misunderstanding. The manner in which the different forms are worshipped, the large number of superstitions which have gradually grown round them, the misleading statements which are some times made in the Puranas and other similar literature, all these things can easily give the wrong impression that Hindus are polytheistic.

The misconceptions and misunderstandings surrounding this subject are easily removed if it is understood clearly that the Hindu worships only one God and the different gods and goddesses who are included' in the Hindu pantheon are merely representations of the functions and powers of that Supreme God in the manifested Universe. The Universe is not only a vast, but an extremely complicated organism, especially when we take into account the invisible worlds which are hidden within the visible physical world. If we examine the machinery of an ordinary modern government or the complex equilibrium of different natural forces which is hidden behind an ordinary physical phenomenon we derive some idea of the unimaginable complexity of the functions and powers which must be required for running the machinery of a universe or solar system. Taking the simpler unit of a solar system for our consideration, we find that according to Occult Doctrine it comes into being periodically out of the One Supreme Brahman and after functioning for some time within His consciousness again disappears into the same Supreme Brahman. The creation, dissolution and the preservation of this huge and complicated organism requires innumerable functions and powers of greater or lesser importance as in running the machinery of a government. Even the creative and destructive functions are not simple as is generally imagined. Creation does not come to an end when a solar system comes into being; destruction is not needed only when it

goes into *pralaya* (dissolution). These functions continue throughout the period of manifestation. And so do all the other functions which are subordinate to, or are associated with, these three important functions. It is these various functions and the powers corresponding to them which are sought to be represented in the forms of different gods and goddesses or Devatas and Devis as they sure called in Hinduism. According to Hindu philosophy this Universe is merely an expression or manifestation of the Supreme Brahman outside whom nothing can possibly exist. So all these innumerable functions and powers exercised in relation to the manifested Universe must be rooted in that Brahman and must be ultimately His functions and powers. The Devis and Devatas can, therefore, be nothing but representations of His functions and powers.

The Devatas and Devis are shown in male and female forms because the function and the corresponding power which enables that function to be exercised are related to each other as two poles, or positive and negative principles. In fact, the existence of the manifested Universe depends upon the primary differentiation of the one Reality into two polar aspects, one positive the other negative, the positive aspect being the source of all functions and the negative aspect the source of all powers. Both the aspects are conscious Principles for in that transcendent state there can be nothing but consciousness.

These two opposite aspects are called Shiva and Shakti and from them arise all the functions and powers which are required when a manifested universe comes into existence. The main functions are, of course, those of creation, preservation and destruction, but there are innumerable others which are derived from or associated with these. It is not possible to enter here into a detailed discussion of the relations existing between these various functions and powers but there are two points which must be made clear to enable the reader to understand easily the details of some symbologies discussed later:

The first point concerns the relations between Devis and Devatas. It will be seen that not only are there innumerable functions and powers in action in the manifested Universe but that each function must be related to its specific power which can make it effective, so that the whole set off functions is matched by a corresponding set of powers like an object and its shadow, and the Devis and Devatas can thus be paired off scientifically. This principle lies at the basis of the fact that particular Devis are related to particular Devatas and are called their consorts. Thus Sarasvati is the consort of Brahma, Lakshmi that of Vishnu and Kali of Rudra. A great deal of confusion exists in Hindu religious literature with regard to this matter owing to lack of proper differentiation between functions and powers on a scientific basis, but one can, at least, understand the general principle.

The second point is concerned with the relation of Shiva, Mahesha and Rudra. These three names are used interchangeably in Hindu scriptures and for popular treatment of many subjects this does not matter. But from the strictly philosophical and scientific point of view this is not correct and leads to confusion. There are three clearly-defined and distinct functions we have to take into account in considering the mechanism of manifestation from the occult point of view and, for the sake of clarity and consistency, each of these names should indicate only one of these functions.

It is not possible to deal here at length with the subtle but real differences in these functions. It may be merely pointed out that taking everything into consideration—the meaning of the words, tradition, and symbology, etc.—it is desirable to confine the name Shiva to that underlying Reality which always remains unmanifest in polar relationship with Shakti. It is the hidden source of all functions which are needed in manifestation and the repository of all manifested systems when they pass into a state of *pralaya* or dissolution. The name Mahesha—meaning the Supreme Ruler or Lord—should obviously be used for that Reality which is called Logos and which lies at the basis of a manifested system and rules, controls and energizes it through its three well-known aspects: Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra. It is the base of a tetrahedron with its three faces, the triple *bel* leaf with its three separate leaves. The remaining name, Rudra, should thus be reserved for the more limited function of destruction. Rudra is thus the third member of the Trinity, the other two being Brahma and Vishnu. These three aspects of Divinity called Shiva, Mahesha and Rudra, though distinct, are related to each other in a very mysterious manner and this partially accounts for the prevailing confusion with regard to their functions and the names which indicate them. But it is not possible to go into this subtle question here. The student should have a clear idea with regard to the three functions indicated above. It will then not really matter to him which name is used for the function involved in a particular Context.

A clear grasp of the fundamental principles underlying Hindu symbolism will enable the student not only to have a correct idea with regard to the essential nature of Devis and Devatas, but also enable him to avoid the confusion resulting from the mixing up of these functions and names. This is rather a disconcerting aspect of the gradual degeneration and confusion which has crept into Hindu philosophical conceptions as a result of the static and orthodox tendencies which have characterized philosophic thought in this country for a long time. The whole subject requires to be studied carefully so that the fundamental doctrines and conceptions of Hinduism may become clarified and order and harmony may be evolved out of the chaos which Hindu religion appears to an outsider. This will not be easy and will require

prolonged and painstaking research but this is very necessary if the ideas of Hindu religion are to be placed on a rational basis. In these days of free thinking and scientific enquiry, one cannot expect to satisfy people with jumbled-up ideas, but must present them, at least rationally, if not scientifically.

The preliminary consideration of the points discussed above has cleared the ground and we can now take up the subject proper.

CHAPTER III

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF HINDU SYMBOLISM

SYMBOLISM is the art of representing ideas, objects, processes, etc. through signs or symbols. A thing which typifies or recalls something naturally by possession of analogous qualities is called a symbol. But we are not concerned in this book with symbolism in general but with the application of this art in representing truths of Hindu religion and philosophy. In the limited context in which we are using the word we may say that symbolism is the art by the help of which truths of religion and philosophy can be represented through forms, signs and stories. Let us not bother about definitions and academic aspects of the subject but come straight to the particular aspect of the subject which we want to study, namely the representation of religious and philosophical ideas through symbols and allegories. The underlying ideas will become clear only after we have considered different aspects of the subject, using a number of examples to illustrate the principles involved.

It would help us to understand more easily what is to follow if we first discuss briefly what may be called the general principles of Hindu symbolism. These principles, as far as I know, have not been studied or set forth systematically and one can only deduce them from a general study of Hindu religion and philosophy combined with the deeper knowledge of the realities of life which is found only in true Occultism and Mysticism. Symbolism is an art and not a science and the symbols are selected, except in the case of natural symbolism, not on a scientific basis but with a view to convey to the common man the underlying ideas as easily and effectively as possible. So, the study of symbolism is mostly a question of interpretation and not scientific investigation and presentation. The interpretation should be such as to appeal naturally to one's reason and commonsense. In fact, it is possible to have more than one interpretation of the same symbol both equally reasonable and illuminating. It is also possible that one may not be able to interpret a particular symbol or may interpret it incorrectly. The important thing about Hindu symbolism is not what is the exact meaning of everything, but that everything has a meaning and generally a profound significance connected with spiritual life.

But this does not mean that a person is free to interpret the symbols according to his own sweet will. Those who devised the symbols were men of real knowledge. They had definite ideas in their mind which they sought to represent by means of these symbols. True interpretation means catching those ideas through intuition and reflecting them as faithfully as

possible for the benefit of others. It is necessary to point out this fact because there is a tendency among a certain class of people to make all kinds of wild suggestions in the way of interpretation, based on very superficial considerations. This kind of interpretation makes confusion worse confounded and further weakens the faith of the average student in the profound significance of the symbols.

In considering symbolism as a method of representing the truths of the inner life, it is necessary to distinguish first between symbol and allegory. The two methods corresponding to these may be called static and dynamic symbolism. In the first method we use a form to symbolize the thing to be represented. The form may be simple or complex. It may symbolize a particular law or quality or power or it may symbolize a number of these in an integrated form. The common characteristic of all such static symbols is that no movement in time or apace is involved.

Dynamic symbolism is generally known by the name of allegory. In this there is a narrative description under guise of which a moral law, a natural process or spiritual truth is sought to be conveyed in an interesting manner. The story may, or may not, suggest by an apparent similarity what is sought to be represented. Generally it does not, and that is why such stories are taken literally by the unwary. The general characteristic of dynamic symbolism is that there is movement in the form of a story or the unfolding of a gradual process with different stages.

Static symbolism may be further subdivided into two classes, which may be called natural and artificial. An artificial symbol is chosen arbitrarily to represent a particular thing because it recalls the thing by virtue of its possessing analogous qualities or through association in thought. There is no natural relation between the two and it is possible to select another symbol which is equally or more effective in this respect. A natural symbol, on the other hand, not only symbolizes the thing in question but also manifests it in a mysterious manner on account of some hidden natural relation between the two. The difference between the two is like the difference between a name and a *vachaka* used in *Mantra Yoga*. A name is chosen arbitrarily and has no natural connection with the object for which it is used. Another name could serve the purpose equally well. But a *vachaka* is a special name which embodies in a mysterious manner the power and qualities of the *vachya*, the thing which it indicates. So it is possible to establish a relation with, and draw upon, the power of the latter with the help of the former, as is done in *Mantra Yoga*. Similar is the relation between a natural symbol and the object it represents. These things will become clear when we consider illustrative examples of each.

In considering artificial symbols which are used in the Hindu religion it appears to be a fundamental principle that in representing anything the symbol chosen is such that it naturally and easily suggests the thing which is sought to be represented. Symbols were meant to give to the common man a concrete object which he could visualize easily and through which he could associate the truths of the inner life in his mind in an integrated form. They were not meant merely for scholars who could grasp abstract ideas to a certain extent and do without any concrete representation. It was, therefore, essential that the symbols used were those taken from familiar objects and such objects as would naturally suggest the quality, state or power which was sought to be represented. Even when a person could grasp the abstract ideas and had to a certain extent outgrown the use of the concrete symbols, these symbols, were meant to help him to fix the different ideas in an integrated manner in a composite mental image. The human mind needs something concrete to which to hold on. It cannot work in a vacuum. It also needs to keep before it an idea of the inner realities. A concrete symbol, therefore, satisfies very effectively both these needs and may be considered as a very happy synthesis of the concrete and the abstract.

The second general principle which we should keep in mind is that in representing a Devi or Devata, everything in the form, and associated with the form, is meant to have a symbolic significance though we may not be able to trace the relation between a particular symbol and the thing symbolized. The complexion of the skin, the smile on the face, the object held in the hand, the manner in which the hand is raised, all these things have their meaning as well as the more concrete and prominent objects associated with the form. If, therefore, the *sadhaka* (aspirant) keeps in his mind the total image with all its component parts and knows also what each part represents, he can have a very elaborate and comprehensive idea with regard to the nature and powers of the Devi or the Devata. The need for such a concept becomes imperative when he tries to pass from the worship of the mere outer form to that of the Reality within. The *bhakta* (devotee) usually starts his meditation with forming an image of the form of his *Ishta-devata* (chosen deity) in his mind. But the next stage is meditation on His qualities or attributes and this knowledge concerning the symbology of the Devata helps him a great deal in this stage. It is only through such a meditation that he can draw nearer to his *Ishta-devata* said prepare himself for the still higher stage in which he tries to transcend the mental concept and grasp the Reality by fusing his consciousness with the consciousness of the *Ishta-devata*. The Devata of the mere beginner is in the external form, that of the advanced *sadhaka* (aspirant) in the realm of the higher mind

and that of the *siddha* (the perfected individual) in his heart, in the realm of consciousness which transcends the intellect.

It should be noted that the remarks in the previous paragraphs are applicable only to forms which are truly symbolic in character and not to those forms which represent historical figures, either *Avataras* (divine incarnations) or spiritual teachers of mankind. These forms are generally the product of the imagination of artists who try to give expression in those forms to the traditional ideas with regard to those historical or mythological figures. Thus the form of Krishna is not symbolic in character while that of Vishnu is. The devotee may use such a form in meditation but he will have to draw upon historical or mythological accounts of the life of that Teacher or upon his imagination for the attributes, etc. associated with him. Sometimes such a historical figure is taken as ah *Avatara* or incarnation of Devata and it is then permissible to see in the form of the *Avatara* the attributes and powers associated with that Devata.

After considering the general principles of Hindu symbolism we shall now take a few examples to illustrate these principles and to show the profound significance hidden behind these symbols which most Hindus know and worship and very few care to understand. We shall begin with natural symbolism.

CHAPTER IV

NATURAL SYMBOLISM

The Symbology of Shiva-Linga

IT has already been pointed out that in natural symbolism the thing represented and the symbol are related naturally and, therefore, the symbol not only represents the reality which it symbolizes but also serves, to a certain extent, as a carrier or vehicle of the power and qualities of that reality. Natural symbols are mostly mathematical forms and some knowledge of mathematics is necessary for full appreciation of the wonderful relationship which exists between a reality and the form which symbolizes that reality.

The most important and fundamental symbol of this nature is the three-dimensional sphere which is represented by a circle in two dimensions. Those who have even as elementary knowledge of mathematics can understand that the sphere is the most perfect form in three dimensions known to us. The distance of the centre of a sphere from every point on its surface is the same. If you take any cross-section of a sphere it will be a circle which is a perfect figure in two dimensions. In short, it is a perfect figure all whose parts are symmetrical and harmoniously balanced. For this reason the sphere should be a natural symbol of the Ultimate Reality which is Complete, Whole, Perfect, and in which all tattoos, principles, powers, etc. exist in perfect balance.

Why is it, then, not used as a symbol of the Ultimate Reality which is called Para-Brahman in Hindu philosophy? Because this Ultimate Reality cannot be an object of worship and no kind of relation can be established between It and the *sadhaka* (aspirant). On account of Its very perfection in which all possible opposites are perfectly neutralized and all different kinds of principles are perfectly blended. It must for all practical purposes be a void though it contains all these opposites and principles within Itself. As the perfect blending of all colours of the spectrum results in the production of white light in which one seeks in vain for any vestige of colour, so the perfect blending of all *tattvas* results in a state in which one seeks in vain for any point with which to establish contact from outside. It is, therefore, the Ever-Unknowable, the Ever-Darkness to those who are in manifestation and the only way to approach it is through the *Shiva-Shakti tattva* which is the Principle in contact with It from within.

It will be easy to understand this unresponsiveness of the Ultimate Reality if we remember that it is when the primary differentiation of that Reality into the Shiva-Shakti

Principle takes place that Shakti appears and response of any kind becomes possible. For response of any kind presupposes the existence of power which can meet the aspirations and devotions of the devotee or the seeker, and a State in which Power as such, does not exist, must be a Temple which remains always closed.

It is for this reason that the sphere has never received recognition as a symbol and has never been worshipped. But there is no reason why we should not consider it as a symbol of that Reality from the philosophical and scientific point of view, for it plays an important and significant part in the phenomena of Nature.

The second natural symbol which plays a very important part in Hindu religion is the ellipsoid which is derived from the sphere by the separation of two focii from the one centre. Everyone can understand how a circle changes into an ellipse if the centre separates into two focii. In the same way, a sphere in three dimensions becomes an ellipsoid when two focii separate from the one centre of the sphere. If the two focii of the ellipsoid are progressively brought closer together it becomes more and more like a sphere and when they coincide we again get a perfect sphere; so that roughly we may say that an ellipsoid is formed when a uni-focal sphere becomes bifocal by separation of two foci. The moment the two focii separate the total perfection of the sphere is destroyed and a kind of *vikara* (distortion) is introduced in the perfect balance and harmony which was present in the sphere. But even with this partial distortion the ellipsoid retains some of the perfection of the sphere. For example, a cross-section of the ellipsoid at right angles to the axis is always a circle, a cross-section along the axis is always an ellipse. So that the ellipsoid stands between the mathematically perfect sphere and all the imperfect solids which it is possible to imagine.

It will be seen from what has been said above about the properties of an ellipsoid that it is eminently suited for symbolizing the *Shiva-Shakti tattva*, the state which comes between the perfect state of the unmanifest Ultimate Reality and the imperfect state of the manifested Universe full of all kinds of distortions and disharmonies. The *Shiva-Shakti tattva* is the result, from the philosophical point of view, of the primary differentiation of the Ultimate Reality into two ultimate principles, one positive, the other negative. These two principles are not only equal and opposite but bound together by means of a polar relationship of which modern science provides many well-known illustrations. They together provide a kind of conscious receptacle in which every system which has been in manifestation rests during the period of dissolution and from which it emerges again when manifestation takes place. In this respect It is somewhat like the *Karana-Sharira* (causal body) of a *Jivatma* (individual soul) which is the repository, between successive incarnations, of all the impressions of previous

experiences (*samskaras*). But of course, the *Shiva-Shakti tattva* is a transcendent state of consciousness at a tremendously high level, and not a body like the *Karana-Sharira*.

All these things are well known and have been pointed out very briefly to show how the ellipsoid serves as a perfect natural symbol of that Reality which is known as the *Shiva-Shakti tattva* in Hinduism. This ellipsoid is called a *Shiva-linga*, the word *linga* in Sanskrit meaning symbol or emblem. The two focii of the ellipsoid correspond to the two poles which represent the positive principle called Shiva and the negative principle called Shakti. It is true that both these principles are in a potential state but in this potential state is hidden the tremendous Energy which in its innumerable forms runs the machinery of the Cosmos as well as all the manifestations of consciousness from the Highest to the lowest.

Is there any indication that this form which symbolizes the *Shiva-Shakti tattva* plays a fundamental part in the structure and functioning of the manifested Universe? Yes. Let us consider manifested life at three levels: solar, human and atomic. The solar system consists of the Sun with the planets going round it. The motion of a planet around the Sun follows Kepler's three laws. Each planet describes an ellipse having the Sun at one focus, the motion being fastest when the planet is nearest the Sun and slowest when it is furthest away. Even comets describe ellipses around the Sun, generally very elongated ellipses in contrast to the nearly circular planetary orbits. Now, an ellipse is merely a cross-section of an ellipsoid, and the elliptical orbits of the planets show clearly that the ellipsoid plays a decisive role in the structure of the solar system on the subtler planes of higher dimensions. Another significant fact which may be noted here is that the Sun is at one focus of these orbits. Where is the other focus? Obviously, this is invisible and is the real Moon referred to in Occult literature, the negative counterpart of the positive Sun.

Let us now come down to the human level. Clairvoyant research has shown that on the lower planes where form plays a dominant role, all the vehicles of the *Jivatma* (individual soul) have the form of an ellipsoid. It is true that the denser part of the body has not this form but the aura in which this body is embedded, has. Even the aura of the physical body has this form, as has been shown by Dr. Kilner by his researches on the health aura, using certain chemicals like dicyannin for sensitizing the eyes. A form is a visible expression of the totality of invisible forces which work in the background on the subtler planes. The fact that the bodies of man in the realm of forms conform to the ellipsoid as a prototype shows definitely that this form plays a fundamental role in the expression of Divine consciousness at the human level. The fact that among living creatures it is only in a human being that the *Shiva-tattva* is present adds deeper significance to the ellipsoidal form of his bodies.

Let us now come to the lowest level, that of the atom. As is well known, an atom is a solar system in miniature. There is a nucleus charged with positive electricity round which negatively charged electrons whirl at a tremendous speed. The nature of the orbits in which the electrons move are ellipses. Bohr in his famous theory regarding the structure of the atom had assigned circular orbits to these electrons but it was shown later by Sommerfeld that the orbits should be elliptical. Just as in the case of the macrocosmic Solar System the elliptical nature of the planetary orbits shows that it is the ellipsoid which lies at the basis of the Solar System in the archetypal world, so does the elliptical nature of the electronic orbits in the microcosmic atom show that the forces which mould the atom on the physical plane emanate from an ellipsoidal archetype.

It will be seen, therefore, that at all the three levels on which Divine Life finds expression in a fundamental unit of manifestation, the ellipsoid plays a definite though invisible role and the supremacy of this form as a basis of manifestation is established without any reasonable doubt.

Is it any wonder then that this form is regarded as sacred and worshipped as a symbol of that Dual, Transcendent, Unmanifest Reality which is referred to as the *Shiva-Shakti tattva*? But its claim to be considered as the highest object of worship on the physical plane is based on something more significant than its being merely a prototype of fundamental forms of manifestation. A full discussion of this problem will take us too deeply into the mysteries of inner life and cannot be taken up here. It will be enough to point out that just as there is a mysterious relation between sound and consciousness which forms the basis of *Mantra Yoga*, so there is also a similar relation between form and consciousness which is the basis of the power which is inherent in such natural symbols. According to the theory of *Mantra Yoga* it is possible to establish communication with a Devata through a mantra. Similarly, through a symbolic form of this nature it is possible to become en rapport with the Reality which it symbolizes—not artificially but naturally. How this is done is a question with which we are not concerned here. It is a mystery relating to the inner life of man which can be resolved only in one way—through inner realization.

The discussion of *Shiva-linga* as a symbol of the *Shiva-Shakti tattva* will not be complete without at least a passing reference to a development brought about by the perversity of the human mind which can sometimes vulgarize and drag down the highest truths to the lowest levels. Who would believe after reading what has been said above that this sacred symbol could be dragged down by perverted minds to the level of ordinary sex? The *Shiva-Shakti tattva* is above the highest levels of manifestation and sexual generation belongs

to a very low level in the scale of manifestation. In fact, it developed in the later stages of evolution both according to Science and Occultism. Besides, the *linga* represents the two Primary *tattvas* in one, both the *tattvas* being potential in this state and so incapable of being associated with sex in any manner. It is true that the polarity implied in the *Shiva-Shakti tattva* may be the ultimate basis of the polarity inherent in sex. But in that way it is the ultimate basis of every kind of polarity in the manifested Universe. No one associates the polarity found in an ordinary magnet with the *Shiva-Shakti tattva* and starts worshipping it.

In dealing with the symbology of *Shiva-linga* we have considered only one natural symbol based on the well-known mathematical three-dimensional figure called the ellipsoid. In Occult Science other mathematical figures like the triangle, square, etc. are also used as symbols for different aspects of the One Reality and as these symbols are natural symbols based on mathematics they should have some occult properties. These potential occult properties should be inherent in the mathematical figure which embodies, as it were, the power of the corresponding *tattva* which it represents.

Are these occult properties of these figures also utilized in Hindu worship ? Yes. The whole science of *Yantras* is based on this. A *Yantra* is nothing but a combination of mathematical figures in a particular manner which can be made the vehicle of certain occult properties in the same manner as a mantra is a particular combination of sounds and has certain potencies associated with it. But as in the case of *mantras*, there are two conditions for its becoming an effective instrument of real power. It must have been constructed on scientific principles and connection must be established with the corresponding power on the inner planes by a person who has the necessary knowledge. Otherwise, it is a mere geometrical figure. The real science of *Yantras* like that of *mantras* has disappeared to a great extent and its outer form is utilized by unscrupulous people to exploit the credulous and the ignorant.

CHAPTER V

ARTIFICIAL SYMBOLISM

The Symbology of Mahesha

LET US now take up for discussion another symbolic form in which the Hindu worships Divinity—that of Mahesha. This form belongs to the category of artificial symbols in the sense that the various components of the composite, integrated image have been chosen not because there is any natural relationship between them and the powers and principles which they represent but because they come nearest to them in appearance or function. They, therefore, easily and naturally suggest to the mind, the inner realities which are sought to be represented by them. For this reason neither any component symbol, nor the integrated symbol as a whole, possesses any special inherent power or potentiality and whatever power or influence the symbol may come to possess is derived from the gradual building up of the mental, emotional and spiritual links between the mind of the aspirant and the object of worship. The worshipper should never forget that He with whom he wants to commune is present within his own heart as a conscious Reality and the mental image which he forms in his mind and vitalizes with his aspiration and devotion acts as a real link between him and his *Ishta-devata* (chosen deity). Through it he can establish an ever-deepening relationship until the barrier between the seeker and the object of his search dissolves completely and the two come face to face.

It will be seen, therefore, that a symbolic form of this type is not necessarily less effective than the one with a natural relationship, for, everything depends ultimately on the will, devotion and intelligence of the aspirant and not on the symbol itself. A natural basis merely helps to bring about more easily a rapport between the devotee and the object of his devotion but cannot dispense with the factors which depend upon the aspirant himself.

Practically all the symbols of this nature which a Hindu worships are human in form—male or female. Before dealing with the symbology of Mahesha we might first consider why these Divine functions and powers—called Devatas and Devis—are always represented in the human form. This practice is based on one of the principles of Hindu symbolism referred to previously, namely that the thing chosen as a symbol is one which comes nearest to the object represented either in appearance or function. A human being is a manifestation of life which comes nearest to Divinity. In the human form consciousness has unfolded to the highest degree so far. The human individual is a microcosm in which all the powers, functions and

faculties, which are manifesting in the Universe on a macrocosmic scale, are present in a potential form or have been made partially active. It is the only living form which contains hidden within it the highest Divine Principle, *Shiva-tattva*, which confers on it the capacity of unfolding *ad infinitum* until the Divine element hidden within it becomes united with the Divine Principle hidden in the whole Universe. It is, therefore, obvious why the human form should be chosen as the symbol of Divinity and the different functions and aspects of Divinity should be represented in this form by associating it with various objects.

It may also be mentioned in this connection that it is only in the human form that the Divine Life descends from time to time either as an *Avatara* or as a great Spiritual Teacher. It is true that *Avataras* have taken place in sub-human forms but that happened before the human form had been evolved. Besides, the stories of these *Avataras* are allegories indicating different stages of evolution and should not be taken literally. Hinduism attaches great importance to the human form and according to it the final perfection of spiritual life can be unfolded only through a human body. According to one of its doctrines even the Devas whose abode is in the Heaven world have to come down to the physical world and take a human body in order to gain the final perfection of *mukti* (liberation).

There is one other point which may be cleared up before we take up for discussion the detailed symbology of Mahesha. It has been pointed out already that in the Hindu scriptures the names, Shiva, Mahesha, Rudra, etc. are used indiscriminately. But since such a practice is too widely prevalent and is deeply rooted in our traditions, all that can be done now is to keep clearly in one's mind the particular level or function involved in a particular context and not mind the particular name which has been used. Since we have already dealt with the *Shiva-Shakti tattva* and its symbol, the *Shiva-linga*, we have now to take the next lower level of Reality, namely the *Maheshvara-Maheshvari tattva* which is the basis of all manifested systems and in its three aspects—Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra and their consorts—carries on all the activities connected with these systems. Every *Ishvara* of a solar system is a facet and an expression of the *Maheshvara-tattva* as the very name *Maheshvara* (Maha + Ishvara) indicates. It is the symbology of this *tattva* represented in the familiar human form and also sometimes referred to as Shiva, Shankara or Mahadeva that we shall now study.

The symbology of Mahesha, or Shiva as He is generally referred to, is the richest and the most profound in the whole field of Hindu symbolism. It involves practically every philosophical concept of the highest spiritual significance and occult truths relating to the innermost mysteries of life. These philosophical concepts or occult truths are represented by different objects and features associated with the human form which symbolizes Him. So

multifarious are the functions and aspects of His nature that it is difficult to include all the symbols indicating them in one integrated image and it is the common practice to include only a few of these in one particular representation. That is how we find the symbolic images varying somewhat in detail. But there are a few symbols which are so necessary for depicting His essential nature that they are generally included in practically every representation. These are the Crescent Moon, the *Damaru* (drum), the Bull, the Tiger's Skin, the Trident and the Snake, All these symbols are familiar things of daily life but they represent the deepest and most significant truths of the inner life. That is why this form presents an ever-inexhaustible source of inspiration and a fascinating object of meditation. It arouses not only the deepest emotions of the devotee but also of those who are on the *Jnana-marga* (Path of Knowledge), Even a philosopher like Shankaracharya was a devotee of Shiva and composed many hymns which show a marvellous synthesis of knowledge and devotion.

Let us now take some of these symbols and consider their underlying significance. We shall begin with the *damaru* which Mahesha holds in one of His hands. It is well known that in Hindu symbolism, hands symbolize the powers of the Devata and the object held in the hand gives an idea of the particular power represented. That is why a Devata or Devi is sometimes shown with more than two hands.

The *damaru* represents one of the subtlest occult doctrines of Hindu philosophy which has been wonderfully illuminated by some of the researches of modern Science. According to this doctrine the *Maheshvara-tattva* is a critical state coming between the Nirguna-Brahman (attributeless Brahman) or the latent *Shiva-tattva* and the Saguna-Brahman (Brahman with attributes) functioning as *Trideva* or the Triple God—or Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra. It must, therefore, combine the attributes of the two states which are utterly dig-similar or rather which are poles apart. The Real and the unreal, the unmanifest and the manifest belong to two different categories of existence which cannot be fused into one homogeneous state. If they have to be brought together they can remain only in the form of an apparently homogeneous but really heterogeneous state in unstable equilibrium. The analogy of the formation of an emulsion from two immiscible liquids may to a certain extent give some idea of this state. The state of emulsion is kept up by agitation or motion and when there is no agitation the liquids tend to separate into two separate layers which serves to illustrate the separation of the Real and the unreal when the agitations of the mind are eliminated and perfect tranquillity is attained. The illustration of the state of emulsion, though apt in one sense is defective, inasmuch as it represents a static condition while the *Maheshvara-tattva* is a dynamic state. The best example in the field of Science of this transcendent state is perhaps resonance.

Resonance, as those who have some knowledge of physics and chemistry know, is a state produced by the alternation of two states at a tremendous speed. The alternation is so rapid that a third kind of state scans to appear. This state is a critical dynamic and non-homogeneous state, though outwardly it appears to be homogeneous. Because it is produced by the alternation of two opposite states it partakes of the nature of both but is wholly neither one nor the other.

Now, the *damaru* produces just such a state in the realm of sound. It produces apparently one homogeneous sound which is composed of two different sounds produced by the ball striking the two membranes alternately. It is eminently suited, therefore, to represent the important function of Mahesha to bring into some kind of relationship the unmanifest state of *Shiva-Shakti tattva* and the manifest state of *Ishvara-tattva* represented by Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra. The suitability of the *damaru* as a symbol is due not only to the fact that it combines two states in one but also to the fact that it produces sound which in its subtlest form forms the very basis of the manifested Universe and is generally referred to as *Nada*. It is through this alternating mechanism, if such a phrase may be used for a purely spiritual process, that the potential Energy in the *Shiva-Shakti tattva* is transformed into the kinetic Energy required for running the machinery of a manifested system.

It will be seen, therefore, that the *damaru* of Mahesha represents that power of His by which He maintains a manifested universe in existence. His consciousness at one moment is centred within Himself—in His *svarupa* (own form) and at the next moment it is centred in the manifested universe and becomes its indwelling Reality. When the consciousness is centred within Himself and He directs His attention inwards He is the unmanifest Brahman and the universe disappears because it is based on His consciousness, and deprived of that basis, cannot exist. When He directs His attention outwards and 'imagines' the Universe, it comes into existence instantaneously. It follows from this that the existence of the manifested Universe is not a continuous phenomenon. It is intermittent just as the picture on the screen in a cinematographic projection is intermittent and is produced by alternate periods of light and darkness. This intermittence of the Universe which should not be confused with the alternation of *srishti* (manifestation) and *pralaya* (dissolution) is not a mere ingenious speculation but a doctrine of both Hindu and Buddhist philosophy supported by occult and mystic traditions. It was difficult to understand it so far but the progress of Science and the discovery of analogous phenomena in the field of physical phenomena has thrown a flood of light on this doctrine and transformed the *damaru* from a rather mystifying symbol into an index pointing to the ultimate mystery of manifestation.

The next important and very significant symbol associated with the form of Mahesha is the Crescent Moon. What does a crescent moon suggest? Obviously, the idea of time. In fact, all primitive people measure the passage of time by the phases of the moon and it is only in advanced civilizations that the solar year is used. But the crescent moon suggests not only the passage of time, it also suggests periodicity, which is found everywhere in Nature. The passage of time is accompanied by cyclic changes in Nature, the cycle of day and night, the cycle of the seasons and the year, the cycle of the four *yugas* and the still larger cycle of manifestation and dissolution. Everywhere we find Nature working in cycles, smaller cycles within larger cycles, wheels within wheels. Not only are there cycles but these cycles are marked by waxing and waning phenomena as the wheel of Time revolves and its different parts go up and come down. In every sphere of life we find birth, growth, zenith, decline and death. The human body, the day, the seasons, civilizations, in fact, all natural phenomena are subject to these cyclic changes and all these changes accompanied by waxing and waning are also symbolized by the phases of the moon. It will be seen, therefore, that the moon is a very apt symbol of the phenomenon of Time with its two important features: duration and periodicity. Another important point to note in this connection is that the crescent moon is an ornament of His body and not an integral part of it. This symbolizes the fact that Time is not an essential feature of the Reality which Mahesha represents, for in Him who is changeless and Eternal, Time becomes latent. It is only an ornament which He puts on when manifestation takes place and puts off when dissolution follows. The unmanifest Reality transcends Time.

We now come to another symbol, the Tiger's Skin on which Mahesha sits or which He puts, round his loins. This symbol has acquired added interest on account of the modern scientific theories regarding the origin of the Universe. According to Science the Universe is a vast mechanism which starts with a tremendous but limited amount of energy which is used up gradually until the mechanism runs down and the Universe is dead. In technical language this is expressed by saying that the entropy of the system goes on increasing until it reaches a maximum when the system stops working. The same is true of the smaller units of manifestation like a solar system and the astronomers talk of the dying suns which can be seen in the heavens through powerful telescopes. All this is easily comprehensible. But the question arises: “How did the Universe start with a vast though limited amount of energy needed for its running for billions of years?” From where did this energy come? Science has no answer to this pertinent and significant question and all kinds of plausible theories have been put forward to account for this unexplained winding up of the clock of the Universe. The

answer of Occultism to this important philosophical problem is definite, clear and rational. Commonsense tells us that the material clock of the Universe cannot wind itself. There must be some Agent which raises the Universe to its high level of energy at its beginning. In other words there must have been a 'creation'. And creation of this kind implies the prior existence of a conscious and powerful Creator who out of His consciousness can create energy and everything else needed for the manifested Universe. It is more reasonable to assume that consciousness can produce energy than that insentient energy can produce itself or raise itself to a higher level.

This explanation, so simple, so compelling in its reasonableness and having a solid foundation in the experience of the highest occultists is not acceptable to modern Science. On account of its obsession with the materialistic nature of the Universe and to account for everything on a mechanistic basis, scientists will go to any absurd length and give the most irrational explanations rather than tentatively accept a hypothesis which not only offers the most reasonable solution of an insoluble problem but also gives meaning to life. But let us not digress, but come back to the point under discussion.

As has been pointed out before, the energy required for running the machinery of any manifested system must come from consciousness and the ultimate source of this energy is the *Shiva-Shakti tattva*. The separation of the two poles in this Principle which must be a change in consciousness develops an enormous potential universal power which can be transformed through different mechanisms—spiritual, mental and material—for all the purposes of all the universes that come into being. It is useless for man to try to visualize the nature or the potential of this Primary Source of Power when he does not know as yet the real nature of some of its lowest manifestations like electricity. In the present context it will be enough to remember that this spiritual Energy is potential even up to the level represented by the consciousness of Mahesha. For though He is the Lord of any manifested system, He is its base, the hidden source from which everything needed in the system comes. This potential energy, like electrical energy in a charged battery, is ready for any kind of work and it is the fact of its being potential which is symbolized by the tiger's skin.

It is well known that a tiger is the *vahana* or vehicle of Durga and symbolizes power in its most concentrated and active form. What more appropriate symbol could there be for potential power which is present in the *Maheshvara-Maheshvari tattva* than a tiger's skin, symbolizing inactive or 'dead' power. With our scientific ideas of potential energy this symbol may appear rather crude, but from the point of view of an ordinary man who does not know science there could not be a more apt symbol of concentrated but potential power.

Just as a tiger is the vehicle of *Maheshvari*, a bull is the vehicle of *Maheshvara*. A *vahana* in Hindu symbolism is a vehicle through which the power of a Devi or the function of a Devata is exercised. The Sanskrit word for a bull is *vrisha*. This word also means righteousness, morality, justice, and it is this second meaning which gives a clue to this important symbol associated with Mahesha. The beneficent power and grace of Mahesha manifests only where there is *dharma* or righteousness. Where there is unrighteousness there is not only no descent of His beneficent power but, on the contrary, that of the terrible wrath of Rudra which ultimately destroys the unrighteous and everything for which they work.

A bull is also a very apt symbol of sheer strength and symbolizes real spiritual strength which can come only from a righteous life. The unrighteous, the dishonest, the cruel are the weakest people really, in spite of their external haughty demeanour and the positions of power in which they may be temporarily entrenched. They not only are weak but feel weak within their heart of hearts and the outer bluster and show of strength is merely a mask to hide from others and themselves the weakness which they feel inside.

Then we come to another mysterious symbol associated with Mahesha: His Third Eye. It is generally believed that the three eyes of Mahesha represent His capacity to see in the past, present and future. This interpretation appears to be only partially correct as the Third Eye is frequently shown in the Puranic stories to have an active, in addition to the perceptive, function. For example, He destroyed Kama Deva or Cupid instantaneously by the fire emanating from His Third Eye when the latter tempted Him. The two ordinary eyes, as normal organs of sensation in the human body, represent ordinary sight, but the Third Eye symbolizes the power of non-instrumental perception and action which are referred to in the Vibhuti Pada of the *Yoga-sutras* of Patanjali. These spiritual faculties are called *Pratibha* and *Vikarana-bhava* and correspond to *Jnanendriyas* (the organs of knowledge) and *Karmendriyas* (organs of action) on the lower planes and to Omniscience and Omnipotence on the Divine planes. Through this, Mahesha as the Overlord 'sees' everywhere, everything taking place in His manifested system in the past, present and future and can bring about any result instantaneously without the possibility of failure or resistance of any sort from any quarter.

We shall consider together, very briefly, two other symbols associated with the form of Mahesh—the Trident and the Snake—before we close this chapter. Both these symbols may appear rather incongruous in a form which represents the highest aspect of manifested Divinity. For, the snake symbolizes evil and the Trident symbolizes punishment of three kinds, pertaining to the *adhyatmika, adhidaivika* and *adhibhautika* (Spiritual, Devic and

physical worlds). How, it may be asked, can evil be associated with Divinity and how can the Lord of Compassion who is called *Shankara* wield a terrible weapon of punishment? It is not possible to go into this interesting philosophical question in detail. It will be enough to point out here that according to Hindu philosophy the Ultimate Reality which is the basis of the Universe is Whole, Complete and Perfectly Balanced. So in manifestation evil must counter-balance good and punishment must go side by side with reward. These pairs of opposites must exist together if the equilibrium of the perfect balance in the underlying Reality is to be maintained and it is, therefore, not possible to have the one without the other. This does not mean that evil and good stand at the same level and it is not necessary for the ordinary man to reject the one and accept the other. What is meant by the symbolic representation of evil is that in the consciousness of Mahesha, upon which rests the whole structure of the manifested Universe, evil must be present, for, there can be nothing outside His consciousness as far as that Universe is concerned. But in the Divine consciousness evil is harmless and is merely a force which balances the good, and thus maintains the harmony of the whole. A snake which is deadly for ordinary people plays harmlessly round the neck of Mahesha. The same considerations hold good in a different way in the case of the Trident. In a scheme of Nature which is associated with evolution and in which spiritual individuals are being evolved who out of their own free will, will reject evil and follow good, and not by outer compulsion, evil must be associated with pain and punishment, and good with pleasure and reward. This is the only way in which inwardly free individuals can be evolved in freedom, and the law of Karma with its so-called rewards and punishments becomes a necessary part of such an evolutionary scheme. And if punishment in the form of pain is as necessary as reward in the form of pleasure both must be a feature of the working of the Divine Will in manifestation. So the Trident becomes in the hand of Mahesha not an instrument of cruel injury but an instrument for bringing people back to righteousness when they stray from the path of *dharma* and need a persistent reminder and a steady prodding for making them change their Course.

CHAPTER VI

THE SYMBOLOGY OF TRIDEVA

LET US now deal very briefly with the symbology of *Trideva* (the Triple God)—Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra—and Their Consorts, Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Kali. This is a very interesting subject but here it is possible to deal only with a few of the important symbols associated with these Devatas and Devis. As has been pointed out in a previous chapter, everything in the form of a Devata or Devi symbolizes something. In this chapter we can deal with only a few salient features of this symbology. Let us start with Brahma and His consort Sarasvati.

Brahma is the Creator. How are things created? Through the instrumentality of the intellect. Before we create anything we have to have a plan or form of what we are to create in our mind. So Brahma represents the Universal Mind or that aspect of Ishvara in which are present all the laws, archetypes and plans of the Universe or the solar system over which He presides. The Universe is considered to be the result of Divine Ideation and as evolution proceeds, the Divine Plan unfurls in the Divine Mind in terms of time and space at different levels and the souls which are part of His consciousness see it as a passing panorama in their respective minds according to their location in time and space and the degree of development which they have reached. Those souls which have penetrated into the heart of this Great Mystery see this Universe unfolding in time and space as the result of Divine Ideation and are not affected and ensnared by this so-called *maya* of Ishvara. They are the *Jivanmuktas* (liberated ones) who live and work in this world and yet are free from its illusions.

Let us take a rapid glance at some of the important symbols associated with Brahma. The most prominent feature of the form of Brahma is His four faces. Faces symbolize aspects and the four faces of Brahma mean that the knowledge contained in the Universal Mind is of four basic types. Since the Universal Mind contains the archetypes and the Divine Plan for the whole period of a particular manifestation, it is not possible for us to grasp the tremendous scope and significance of this totality of transcendent knowledge and how it is divisible into four types. A more comprehensible interpretation in accordance with Hindu tradition is to correlate these four types with the four Vedas which symbolize these four basic types of knowledge. According to Occultism, the Vedas, as we know them now, are mere fragments of a vast and lost literature which embodied, or tried to embody, the totality of knowledge. What the original extent and scope of this knowledge was no one knows except high Adepts of

Occultism, but it must have certainly reflected the fourfold nature of the Universal Mind. The four Vedas as we have them now are its mere relics and reminders of the fourfold nature. This is too vast and complicated a subject to be discussed fully here but what little has been said will help us to get a glimpse into the inner significance of the four faces of Brahma.

The second symbol which we may take up for consideration is the Swan, the vehicle of Brahma. Now, a swan is considered to be a symbol of beauty in Hindu tradition and its association with Brahma as a vehicle is meant to point to the fact that the creative function of Brahma expresses itself generally through beauty. We all know that wherever there is real creative work, it is almost always associated with beauty. Every work of art is a thing of beauty. Another quality associated with a swan is discrimination, the capacity to separate the essential from the non-essential. Real knowledge always develops the capacity to discriminate between the essential and non-essential and the deeper our knowledge the more easily we can separate the milk of essential facts and principles from the water constituting the details with which the essential is diluted as the proverbial swan of Hindu tradition is said to do. We should not, however, mix up this lower intellectual discriminative faculty which is related to the intellect with the higher type of discriminative faculty which is related to the Buddhi, and which can discriminate between the Real and the unreal. As is well known the functions of Brahma are related to the intellect and are exercised through the instrumentality of the intellect. The book in one of the hands of Brahma also symbolizes the same fact, but a book is a symbol of *apara-vidya* (the lower kind of knowledge), which can be acquired from an external source and which is necessary for creating things in the lower worlds.

The Consort of Brahma is Sarasvati and since a Devi represents the power of the corresponding Devata, the symbols associated with Her should suggest the ways and means through which the function or functions of the Devata are exercised. Now, how is knowledge represented by Brahma brought into use? Obviously through technique. When we have to put any knowledge to practical use we must first develop a technique for doing so. Whether it is a question of making an aeroplane or a piece of cloth or producing music or writing a book or painting a picture we must first develop and acquire the necessary technique. The greater the mastery of the technique the easier the utilization of knowledge and the more perfect the production. Creative work presupposes the mastery of the necessary technique.

Modern Science provides wonderful examples of the extraordinary and sometimes miraculous results which can be achieved by patient and intelligent development of various kinds of techniques. Some modern techniques are extremely complicated, and marvels of human ingenuity and team work. For example, the production of a bomber plane requires

assembling of its different parts from two thousand eight hundred blueprints. The highly specialized and great variety of techniques which are involved in the production of a submarine or a rocket stagger our imagination. It is these infinite number of techniques which are symbolized by the *Vina* (stringed musical instrument) in the hands of *Sarasvati*. All these techniques, involved in all branches of art and science which have been discovered or are yet to be discovered are part of the consciousness of Sarasvati, are in fact different expressions of Her unlimited power which enables Her to translate into action the will of Her Lord in His creative work in the Universe.

The symbology of Vishnu is quite different from that of Brahma because He is the Preserver. His paramount function is to keep in equilibrium the infinite number of forces which by their action and interaction keep the Universe in manifestation: the forces of creation and destruction, the forces of expansion and contraction, the forces of change and conservation. The four objects in His four hands give an extraordinarily clear indication of His over-all functions in the Universe over which He presides.

The Conch-shell represents *Nada* which forms the very basis of manifestation as it is through its agency that all kinds of forces can be generated and changes of form can be brought about. The Pranava (the syllable Om) is the outermost expression of *Nada* or that all-embracing subtle vibration from which the infinite variety of vibrations in the manifested Universe are derived as the infinite number of colours are derived from white light. It is the *vachaka* (word) of Ishvara. This mean not only that through its instrumentality the consciousness of the individual *Jivatma* (soul) can be made to merge with the consciousness of the *Paramatma* (Universal Spirit) but also that through its use all kinds of forces and powers can be invoked by those who have the necessary knowledge and purity of mind. It is really an expression on the physical plane of that fundamental Natural power-through which the Natural functions of Ishvara are exercised and the necessary changes in the working of the Universe brought about. Anyone who has heard the sound produced by a conch-shell and observed its resemblance to Pranava will see at once the appropriateness of this common object as a symbol of the power which resides in *Nada*. It is to invoke this primary divine power that the conch-shell is sounded in all Hindu ceremonies and the *Pranava* is intoned, before *sankalpa*, the resolve made at the beginning of every ceremony. In fact, all Vedic mantras of high spiritual significance begin with the syllable Om.

The power symbolized by the conch-shell is the normal power through which all the ordinary natural activities and forces are controlled and regulated. But sometimes these forces go beyond the limits which are permissible for a stable equilibrium with the result that the

progress of evolution is seriously retarded and requires the special intervention of the Lord. On such occasions His special power symbolized by His Chakra (discus) comes into play in order to restore equilibrium. This extraordinary power is drastic, sudden and irresistible and accomplishes instantly and completely whatever has to be accomplished. It may be exercised on a big scale or a small scale, even for helping or destroying individuals but whenever and wherever it is exercised it accomplishes His purposes without fail. The stories in the Puranas illustrating the use of this extraordinary power of Vishnu are allegorical in nature and are meant to show that when the forces of *adharma* or unrighteousness reach extraordinary proportions and begin to endanger equilibrium in a particular system, reaction or retribution comes swiftly and sweeps away everything before it. History provides some illustrations of this phenomenon and even in the life around us if we keep our eyes open we can see Vishnu's Chakra in action.

The *gada* and *padma* or the club and the lotus in the remaining two hands of Vishnu symbolize the punishments and rewards which accrue to human beings from *papa* (the misdeeds) and *punya* (beneficent deeds) done by them in the course of their life. *Gada* was a weapon used in ancient India for punishing a person and a lotus is a well known symbol of boon or reward granted by a Devata or Devi. The Law of Karma which is working in the realm of human affairs and which automatically brings about the restoration of equilibrium which we disturb by our actions is inexorable in its action. Good actions, emotions and thoughts in the widest sense of these terms, called *punya*, bring experiences to the individual which are pleasant, while evil actions or *papa* bring experiences which are unpleasant and so not only restore the equilibrium but tend to bring back the individual to the path of righteousness and ensure his evolution. Human beings are destined to follow the Universal Law of *Dharma* or righteousness by inner choice as free individuals and not by outer compulsion like automatons. So Nature has given them the freedom to do what they like but invested every action which they do with an inherent quality to produce reactions according to the nature of the original actions. So through attractions of pleasures and repulsions of pain man is automatically and inexorably drawn to the path of righteousness or *dharma* in the long course of his moral and spiritual evolution. Vishnu, being the Preserver, His power is constantly restoring equilibrium wherever it is disturbed and the Law of Karma may, therefore, be considered as an automatic or natural expression of this power in the evolution of humanity.

Naturally, the power which enables Vishnu to exercise His over-all functions and which is symbolically represented by the Goddess Lakshmi should be associated with objects

which are indicative of those functions. Let us take for instance, the power of preservation of human life. We most frequently and rather crudely associate this power with wealth because it is through wealth that we can procure all things necessary for our preservation such as food, clothing and shelter. So in our materialistic age (with its crude ideal of "eat, drink and be merry" Lakshmi has been almost completely identified with wealth, and this accounts for the fervour and devotion with which she is worshipped at the time of Divali, the festival of lights. Nobody looks at the jar containing *amrita* (nectar) which she holds in her hand as a symbol of Immortality. For Vishnu is also the giver of *mukti* or Immortality and Lakshmi as His Consort holds the jar of *amrita* which confers Immortality and thus gives us immunity from the bondage of birth and death.

The remaining member of the Hindu Trinity, Rudra, is related to Mahesha and Shiva as was pointed out in chapter V. As the distinction between the functions of Rudra, Mahesha and Shiva is very subtle and not easy to understand, and also because these three names are used almost interchangeably in different contexts in Hindu scriptures, let us not add to this confusion by dealing with this interesting question here. We shall therefore pass over the symbology of Rudra and Kali.

CHAPTER VII

THE STORIES OF HIRANYAKASHIPU AND BHASMASURA

WE have so far dealt with symbols, both natural and artificial, to illustrate static symbolism. A closely allied method of representing truths of the inner life is in the form of allegories which are examples of dynamic symbolism. An allegory is a story which may or may not have any basis in fact. The Puranas are full of such stories which sometimes sound quite absurd when read superficially but fascinate the mind by their aptness when we get a glimpse into their inner and true meaning. I shall deal with two such stories which are meant to warn people who, drunk with power, tread recklessly the path of *adharma* (unrighteousness) under the mistaken notion that they can somehow, by their cleverness and ingenuity, evade the consequences of their evil deeds. Both these stories are well known though I am doubtful if many people understand their inner significance.

The first story is that of Hiranyakashipu. Although the story is well known, let us recall its main features before we consider its inner significance. Hiranyakashipu was a king of the *Daityas* (demons). fife had a son, Prahlada, who was a great devotee of Vishnu and from his earliest childhood showed the characteristics of a devotee—unceasing devotion to the Lord and unbounded faith in Him. His father did not like this at all and tried hard to dissuade him from worshipping Lord Vishnu whom he regarded as his enemy. When persuasion and threats failed to have any effect on Prahlada, Hiranyakashipu ordered his men to kill him. They tried to drown him, to poison him, to get him bitten by deadly snakes and trampled under the foot of an elephant but all their efforts failed and they could not do him the least harm. Then the king himself decided to kill Prahlada, advanced towards him with his sword and mockingly asked Prahlada where his beloved protector was. Prahlada replied that his Lord was present everywhere, even in the pillar in front of them. Hiranyakashipu gave a blow at the pillar and asked in derision: “Even in this?” At this the pillar burst open and out of it emerged a strange and terrible figure with the lower part of the body resembling that of a human being and the upper part resembling that of a lion. The roaring form of Nrisimha (Man-lion) caught hold of Hiranyakashipu, sat down on a threshold, placed the struggling body of Hiranyakashipu on his thighs and tore open his heart with his claws.

Now, the manner in which Hiranyakashipu was killed is rather interesting. The whole significance of the story lies in this. After long and rigorous austerities he had obtained a boon from Brahma. He could not be killed either during day or night. He could not be killed inside

a house or outside. He could not be killed on the earth or in the sky. He could not be killed by a man or a beast. He could not be killed by any weapon and so on, and so forth. Safeguards were requested and granted to provide against all kinds of circumstances so that it appeared to Hiranyakashipu that he could not be killed under any circumstances. On the strength of this boon and the false confidence which it produced he started his rule of oppression in the most reckless manner, the whole life of evil ways culminating in his determination to slaughter his own son for no other reason except to prevent him from worshipping Lord Vishnu.

So the Lord was hard put to it in devising a means of killing Hiranyakashipu when the time came for doing so. He had to respect the promise given by Brahma and fulfil all the conditions provided in the boon. But nothing is beyond the Lord's wisdom and ingenuity and He managed to achieve his object while fulfilling to the minutest detail all the conditions of the boon. He took Hiranyakashipu on his lap (neither on the earth nor in the sky) and sitting on the threshold (neither outside nor inside the house) tore open his heart with his claws (no ordinary weapon) at *sandhya* (twilight) time (neither day nor night).

Now, the story may or may not be true. It may have a historical basis or may belong to the realm of mythology but what is its inner significance? The important truth which is hidden behind this story is meant to serve as a solemn warning to all evil-doers, especially those who consider themselves very clever and rely on their ingenuity to escape Karmic retribution. We all know how the mind of an evil-doer works. Persistence in evil clouds his Buddhi and deprives him of even ordinary intelligence and he begins to imagine that he can devise safeguards against all kinds of contingencies. He may be very clever and may entrench himself in a position where he outwardly appeals impregnable, when it appears impossible to defeat his evil designs. But God can always find a way of thwarting the most elaborate and clever designs which any individual, party or nation can adopt in the pursuit of an evil course of action, when the proper time comes. And this time generally comes when things have gone to the extreme limit.

The most striking example of this kind in modern times is the defeat of Hitler and the destruction of the Nazi party in the last war. Hitler built up a formidable war machine of gigantic proportions with the aid of German resources and German efficiency. He became so drunk with power and so blinded by his obsession of the superiority of the German race that he started on a course of world conquest and in the beginning it appeared that he might succeed. One of his mad passions, which was characteristic of his ruthlessness and cruelty, was the complete extermination of the Jews. Millions of Jews were killed in cold blood. They were chloroformed, their bodies flung into electric incinerators and burnt to ashes. Many of

them were made to dig their own graves and bury themselves. There is, nothing more horrible, senseless and cruel which has happened during the last thousand years than this wholesale extermination of the Jews by the Nazi party under Hitler and one could naturally expect a swift Karmic retribution for this extreme kind of evil. But Hitler had tremendous military power and had conquered many countries in Europe. Many of the countries still unconquered seemed to be at his mercy and it appeared as if it was only a question of time when he would be master of the whole continent. But there is no power on earth which can delay the working of the bidden forces and laws in Nature which always destroy evil when it reaches the magnitude and involves a very large number of people. How Nemesis ultimately overtook Hitler and the Nazi party and destroyed their cruel regime in spite of its efficiency and power is a matter of recent history and within the memory of the present generation. This should serve as a terrible lesson to those nations which depending upon their power, their resources, their vast populations, their scientific achievements and their military machines think of embarking on a course which brings untold suffering to large sections of humanity. But will it?

It is not only for the evil-doers of the Hirariyakashipu or Hitler type that this story has a lesson. The law holds good equally for ordinary people who may be tempted to do wrong and tread the path of *adharma* under the mistaken notion that they are clever enough to evade Nemesis indefinitely. Such an individual generally thinks that either the law of retribution does not really exist or he can violate it as he is used to violating man-made laws. This lack of faith in the law does not give him exemption from the natural consequences of doing evil. The ignoring of the law, knowing it, is a part of the natural process which leads him gradually into circumstances which bring about his undoing. In proportion as the enormity or gravity of the evil increases, the day of reckoning draws near, more and more swiftly.

It will be seen, therefore, that our only safety lies in treading the path of *dharma* or righteousness consistently, unfalteringly, in giving no quarter to evil, in constantly watching our thoughts, actions and motives and freeing them resolutely from any taint of evil. Let us not overtook minor propensities for doing evil such as lying, deceiving people, making dishonest gains, taking unfair advantage of people or institutions. These things may not land us in a jail and yet they are the germs out of which grow the criminal tendencies which must ultimately lead us into serious trouble. For, sooner or later, if we persist in treading the path of *adharma* we cross that line of safety where the capacity to see evil in ourselves is destroyed and we start running recklessly towards our own destruction.

How does the law of retribution work and manage to catch the wrong-doer in the end? The ways of Providence are innumerable and inscrutable but there is one obvious method which is illustrated in a very interesting manner by the story of Bhasma-sura. Bhasmasura was another Daitya (demon) who, through austerities, obtained a boon from Lord Shiva according to which anybody on whose head he put his hand was reduced to ashes instantaneously. Being armed with this novel kind of power he started destroying his enemies by just putting his hand on their heads. As his Buddhi became completely clouded as a result of his evil deeds, the silly idea came into his mind one day that if he could put his hand on the head of Lord Shiva Himself he could destroy Him and become the undisputed lord of the whole world including Devi Parvati. So fascinated did he become by this evil idea that he finally decided to destroy Lord Shiva and to make the story interesting it has been described in great detail how the Lord had to flee from him to save His life until Vishnu the Lord of Wisdom who works through Buddhi came to His rescue, Vishnu using his supernormal powers immediately assumed the form of a lovely and fascinating damsel and started dancing in front of Bhasmasura with exquisite grace and beauty. The half-witted Daitya was at once attracted by her charm and came completely under its spell. He also started dancing by her side, imitating her and repeating everyone of her gestures. The thing went on until he, in a semi-hypnotized condition, put his hand on his own head and reduced himself to ashes instantaneously.

What does this story seek to convey to the ordinary man? That when we are treading the path of evil and the time of reckoning comes we ourselves do something which brings about our undoing. The fact is that our Buddhi becomes more and more clouded owing to a vicious circle being set up and we start doing things in an unintelligent manner until we do the one thing which leads to our being caught and punished. Most criminals are caught in this manner, in traps which they generally set for themselves. All people who, drunk with power, embark upon a life of oppression, cruelty or injustice, themselves bring about their own undoing by taking one foolish step after another. So great an authority as Mr. Churchill has said that England was quite unprepared after the fall of France in the Second World War and if Hitler had attacked her immediately he could have occupied the country without much difficulty. And with the fall of England it would have been far more difficult to defeat Germany. But Hitler did not. Then he made his second great blunder in declaring war on the Soviet Union against the advice of his generals and involving the irresistible German army in the wide expanses and severe weather conditions of Russia. Both these steps were taken by Hitler himself and he who had so cleverly built up the mighty German empire became himself instrumental in bringing, about its destruction.

These things are of particular significance these days when, as a result of scientific and other technical advancements, it is possible to build up a mammoth governmental machinery of tremendous efficiency and power and to inflict unimaginable suffering not only on other people but also on the very people from whom the government derives its power and for whose benefit it professes to exist. As a result of this wonderful ‘progress’ which humanity has made we have reached the stage when on the uncertain and unreliable discretion of an ordinary mortal depend the lives of half the human race. He has only to utter one word and in an hour or so half the people on our earth will be mercifully transported to the other side of death, leaving the world in such a condition that for the remaining half life would not be worth living.

As if to meet this challenge of the enormous concentration of power and the corresponding capacity to inflict suffering on a colossal scale Nature seems to have devised correspondingly more powerful instruments of retribution in the form of the hydrogen bombs and inter-continental missiles. The lesson which reason, common humanity and religion could not instil into our minds is now being learnt through sheer fear. Let us hope the lesson will be learnt fully and finally without Nature having to teach it through an atomic war.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHURNING OF THE OCEAN

(*Samudra-Manthana*)

ALLEGORIES are used in the Puranas not only to convey truths of a moral nature but also those concerning Cosmic or natural processes. Some of the greatest mysteries connected with the evolution of life at various stages which are part of the Occult Doctrine are presented to the common man in the form of interesting stories woven round Devis and Devatas.

One of the most significant and well-known stories of this nature which is found in the *Bhagavata Purana* is that of *Samudra-Manthana* or the churning of the Ocean. This story may be given first very briefly before we discuss some of the important truths which it is meant to convey in a veiled form.

According to the account given in the *Bhagavata-Purana*, once the sage Durvasa was returning from the abode of Vishnu with the garland which he had received from the Lord as a token of favour (*prasada*). On his way through the Heaven world he presented this garland to Indra, the Lord of the Heaven world. But Indra did not take the gift with the necessary reverence and humility and put the garland on the head of his elephant who trampled it under his foot. Durvasa could not tolerate this haughty behaviour which implied lack of reverence towards the Lord and pronounced a curse on Indra as a result of which he and all the Devas were driven out of the Heaven world by the Daityas, their eternal enemies.

The suffering Devas went in a body to Brahma who agreed to take them to the abode of Vishnu' and intercede for them. On being invoked, the Lord Vishnu appeared before the Devas and promised to help them in regaining heaven. But he advised the Devas to make a truce with the Daityas for the time being and to persuade them to co-operate in the difficult project of churning the Ocean with the object of getting out of it *amrita* or the Nectar of Immortality. On drinking the *amrita* the Devas would become Immortal and could then effectively fight the Daityas for regaining their lost kingdom of Heaven. As advised by the Lord the Devas came to an understanding with the Daityas and made the proposal of jointly churning the Ocean for *amrita*. The Daityas also liked the idea very much and agreed to co-operate with the Devas in this difficult task.

The story then describes in detail the method adopted in extracting *amrita* from the Ocean, each of these details having some significance. First, they uprooted a mountain called Mandarachala to serve as a staff for churning and started taking it to the Ocean. But it fell

down on the way, burying many Devas and Daityas under it. No amount of effort could then enable them to move the mountain further. At this, the Lord appeared, lifted the mountain with his left hand and deposited it on the shore of the Ocean. Then they persuaded the king of serpents, Vasuki, to serve as a rope in the churning operation on the condition that he would also get a portion of the *amrita* as his share.

When the churning started, the mountain having nothing to support it underneath, began to sink slowly and even the combined effort of the Devas and the Daityas could not stop this. Again the Lord had to come to their aid and took the form of a tortoise to give support to the mountain from below. Then the churning started with the Devas on one side holding the tail of the serpent and the Daityas on the other side holding its head. As a result of this churning different things began to come out of the Ocean one after another. All these were suitably disposed of by mutual consent of the Devas and the Daityas. As we shall see later all these things have a symbolic significance and represent the various products of evolution which appear in the Macrocosm or the microcosm as these unfold in terms of time and space.

The last to appear from the Ocean as a result of the churning was Dhanvantari bearing a pot full of *amrita* in his hands. The moment the Daityas saw the pot of *amrita*, they snatched it away from Dhanvantari's hands and began to fight with each other for its possession. The pot passed from one Daitya to another but no one could keep it for a sufficiently long time to be able to take even a sip of the amrita. The Devas remained quite undisturbed by all this as Vishnu had previously assured them that they alone would be allowed to drink the *amrita*.

While this was going on Vishnu assumed the form of Mohini, an enchantress, who was so exquisitely beautiful that all the Devas and the Daityas came immediately under her spell. The Daityas particularly became so enamoured of her that they stopped fighting for the *amrita* and requested her to take possession of the pot and distribute the *amrita* equally among them. The more Mohini showed her reluctance to undertake this responsibility the more they insisted that she should distribute the *amrita* among them. Ultimately, they put the pot of *amrita* in her hands and requested her to distribute the *amrita* as she liked, promising not to interfere in any way.

With this promise given by the Daityas of their own accord, owing to their infatuation, Mohini agreed to distribute the *amrita* among them. She asked the Daityas to sit in a row on one side and the Devas on the other. So powerful was the spell she had cast on the Daityas that they did nothing when Mohini started distributing the *amrita* among the Devas and

finished it with the last of the Devas thus depriving every Daitya of his coveted share. It was only then that the Lord showed Himself in His true form and left for His heavenly abode.

When the Daityas came to their senses and realized that they had been deprived of the *amrita* by a stratagem, they became furious and attacked the Devas immediately. A fierce battle ensued but as the Devas had already become immortal they could not be defeated. When the Daityas felt that they were losing the battle they began to utilize their power of creating illusions of various kinds to confuse and overpower the Devas. In their extremity the Devas again remembered the Lord and appealed to Him for help. When the Lord appeared the illusions created by the Daityas were automatically destroyed and the Daityas were defeated and driven out of Heaven.

This in short is the story of the churning of the Ocean. Anyone who reads the story intelligently and with an open mind will see at once that it is an allegory. He may not be able to connect the different incidents given in the story with the different aspects of the evolutionary process as revealed by history, science or occultism, but that the whole story is an allegory concerning the evolutionary process in a general way there can be no doubt. We should not expect to find in such allegorical stories, which are meant for the masses, the exact formulation and representation of facts and laws which we find in scientific treatises. In the first place, those for whose instruction this mode of conveying truth has been devised are not generally capable of understanding and appreciating facts and laws of Nature in scientific or philosophical language. Secondly, such stories are part of the religious lore and must therefore use similes and symbols with which the common man is familiar and which he can easily understand and remember. This accounts for the fact that the chief characters in such stories are generally the Devis and Devatas with whom every Hindu is familiar and for whom he has at least reverence if not love.

There can be no doubt that this kind of mixing up of the Devis and Devatas with the life of ordinary human beings with all their failings and depicting them frequently as ordinary mortals introduces anthropomorphism in religion and sometimes debases the concept of divinity in the minds of those who are not aware of the inner significance of these things. It also gives to the ordinary man an excuse for continuing to live his life with all its weaknesses and compromises with evil. He is naturally inclined to think and feel that if Divine Beings are subject to the passions and weaknesses of human beings and are not able to rise above them, then the ideals of religion and morality are really unattainable and need not be striven after seriously.

It must be said in fairness to those who have adopted this popular method of conveying truths of the inner life that they did their best to counteract the tendencies referred to above. The importance and the necessity of translating the moral and religious ideals into spiritual life is emphasized again and again on every suitable occasion and moral and religious instruction is interspersed between allegories and other stories everywhere in the Puranas so that no misunderstanding may be created on this important question. Anyway, the almost universal use of symbols and allegories in the representation of natural and spiritual truths shows that the advantages of this method outweigh the disadvantages and this is also corroborated by the healthy influence which books like the Puranas, etc. have exercised on the Hindu mind. Those who feel any kind of revulsion towards this kind of literature must learn to read these things not with the eyes of the flesh but with those of the Spirit. These things were not really meant for those who had lost faith and the spirit of reverence and looked at everything through the lower mind completely devoid of intuition.

It is not possible to trace here in detail the allegorical significance of the story of *Samudra-Manthana*, firstly, because the subject of the evolution of life and consciousness is very vast; and secondly, because those who are not familiar both with Hindu mythology and modern scientific developments will find such discussion confusing. But there are a few aspects of this story which are of general interest or have a bearing on some problems of the modern, world. These may be pointed out in order to show that those who presented these ideas in the form of allegories had a thorough grasp of the nature of life and its phenomena. They were not only fully aware of the tendencies inherent in human nature but could also suggest effective methods of solving the recurrent problems of human life. These methods are based on a wider and deeper view of life as a whole and are likely to be more effective than the palliatives which are adopted these days to cure the maladies of modern civilization.

The following few facts of allegorical significance in the story will be found to be of general interest:

1. *Samudra* or the Ocean in the story symbolises the Primordial, Boundless Chaos or the Great Deep out of which all things come during manifestation and into which they disappear at the time of *pralaya* or Dissolution. It contains nothing actually and everything potentially. *Manthana* means "churning" and the churning of the Ocean means giving it the impulse which results in the manifestation and evolution of all kinds of objects on the form side and unfoldment of consciousness on the life side. As a result of this process set in motion during manifestation all kinds of products—physical, mental and spiritual—begin to appear, as if from nowhere, making more complex and enriching the manifested Universe and

providing more and more varied and complex experiences to souls evolving in it. The things which are mentioned in the story as coming out of the Ocean, as a result of the churning, should be considered merely as illustrative of the infinite variety of things which appear during the course of evolution in a manifested Universe. They are all symbolic in character as their very names show. Thus *Kama-dhenu* which means “the cow which fulfils all desires”, obviously represents the faculty or power of desire which has the inherent power of fulfilment. *Kalpa-vriksha* which means “the tree which makes manifest whatever you imagine under it” clearly refers to the power or faculty of imagination which is the basis of all creative work. The wonderful achievement of modern Science in producing such a large number and variety of things by churning the Ocean of physical matter and force are possible because mankind has already evolved the faculties of desire and imagination to a high degree. When higher mental and spiritual faculties have been evolved it will be possible to churn the subtler realms of Nature and make manifest the Divinity which is present potentially in man. It is in this way that a Cosmos is gradually evolved out of Chaos.

2. The second point to be noted in the story is the presence in manifestation of two opposite forces which by their interaction (co-operation and conflict) help in bringing into manifestation what is unmanifest. Evolution is generally the result, of the interaction of opposite forces. The necessity of two opposing forces in the evolutionary scheme is due to the fact that it is only in this way that a balance can be maintained in a dynamic world. A single force can maintain equilibrium only in a static world. Evolution is a dynamic process requiring constant adjustment of all kinds of forces and thus requires two opposing forces in every field of activity. These forces push each other, now to one side then to another, constantly arriving at new and temporary equilibriums at different points.

These forces are symbolized in the story by the Devas and the Daityas. In Hindu mythology, the Devas and the Daityas are not identified necessarily with good and evil. The Devas and the Daityas represent respectively forces which are in harmony with the Divine Will and thus help evolution directly and those which are against the Divine Will for the time being and thus help evolution indirectly. We may conceive of their respective functions as analogous to the propelling force and the force of resistance both of which are needed for motion. A vehicle moves on a road not only localise there is a force propelling it but also because there is the resistance of the road. An aeroplane driven by a propeller can move only because of the resistance of the air.

The modern world provides many striking examples of the acceleration of human progress sometimes by the co-operation and at other times by the antagonism between the two

opposite camps into which humanity seems to be inevitably divided. Nothing has helped the progress of modern Science so much as the competition and conflict between the two opposing blocks in which the modern world is divided. The motive is the domination and if possible the destruction of the opposite block, but all the same this has helped evolution as co-operative effort has not been able to do so far. Let us hope a period of cooperative effort will follow the present one of dangerous competition.

The story is obviously meant to show that the presence of two opposing forces in the world is not accidental but a necessary feature of the evolutionary scheme, that these opposing forces sometimes co-operate and at other times oppose each other, and that sometimes one side gains ascendency and sometimes the other. The idea that the so-called evil or the forces which oppose the Divine Will in evolution will ultimately be completely eliminated leaving the field for ever to those which co-operate with that Will does not appear to be tenable. Good and Evil, the Devas and the Daityas and all such opposing forces appear to be permanent features of the Divine Plan. It is only for a time that the good can remain in the ascendant and dominate the evil. Being only relative good it is liable to corruption and this corruption brings into existence an opposing force which destroys the corrupt forms and establishes a new order, generally with an interim ascendency of the opposing and sometimes cruel and evil force. This see-saw movement of opposing forces seems to be inherent in the natural processes and is an aspect of that eternal rhythm which brings about the rise and fall of civilizations, the growth and decay of world movements and the ascendency and decline of ideologies. Nothing is and can be permanent in the realm of space and time. All is change, accompanied by ebb and flow. To us certain things may appear to be permanent and we may strive for aims with a view to bring about permanent states but this is only because our span of life is so short, our vision is so myopic and our mind is so limited. We might as well try to make the oceans stop the ebb and flow of tides.

This does not mean that we should not try to change conditions which we consider undesirable and should allow evil to have its way. It does not mean that nations will always be at war with one another and humanity will always be in danger of being destroyed in an atomic war. Opposition and competition can be of many kinds and at many levels and is quite compatible with behaviour which is at least civilized if not also human and brotherly. The existence of this law of ebb and flow in human affairs only means that we should adopt a dynamic and flexible attitude towards conditions prevailing around us and not hope to achieve a victory for our cause once for all and then live in peace for ever. The conflict between good and evil, between right and wrong, between freedom and slavery, between exploitation and

justice, between love and hate is to be taken as eternal for all practical purposes and we have to be eternally vigilant.

3. The third point worth noting in this allegorical story is that special help is always given by the Divine forces at the back of evolution whenever the evolutionary process is blocked. Vishnu helped in moving the mountain to the shore of the Ocean when the combined strength of the Devas and the Daityas could not do it. He again prevented the mountain from sinking m the Ocean by taking the form of a tortoise and giving it support from beneath. He used His power of Illusion in preventing the Daityas from taking *amrita* (the Nectar of Immortality) and becoming immortal. This illustrates and symbolizes the fact that Divine intervention always takes place either in the form of a movement or an *Avatara* whenever there is a great crisis in human affairs and either the world order is threatened with destruction by the ascendency of evil forces or there is an insuperable block in the path of orderly progress. Divine intervention is needed in such cases to remove the block or restore the equilibrium.

It is necessary to emphasize this idea particularly these days when the spectacular progress made in the field of Science has turned the heads of people in the vanguard of intellectual and scientific exploration and made them not only forget that Divine forces are playing a great though hidden part in this drama of rapid technological and other kinds of progress but even to deny any part to such forces. It is thus utter lack of humility, reverence and denial of Divinity in our affairs that is to some extent responsible for the wrong turn which scientific progress is taking and the fear and mutual distrust which are dominating the minds of people in spite of the means of abundance and rapid progress at our disposal. We are not immune to the penalties which go with a haughty attitude of this kind and should not forget the curse of the sage Durvasa which was pronounced when the gift from Heaven was treated lightly by Indra. Let us hope the tide of materialistic thought, which may be considered as a reaction to religious bigotry and superstition, will recede in time and give place to a more reasonable and reverential attitude towards the hidden Deity who guides and manipulates even the external forces from behind the scenes.

4. The fourth moral which is sought to be conveyed to the common man in the allegory is the importance of remaining on the side of Divine forces and depending upon Divine guidance in our work. All the powers and resources of the spiritual realms come ultimately to the aid of those who live according to Divine Laws and flow with the evolutionary current. This is inevitable in a world which is based on Divine consciousness and guided by Divine Wisdom. Vishnu came to the help of the Devas and enabled them to drink

the *amrita* even though the Daityas, owing to their superior strength, had taken possession of the jar containing *amrita*. He again came to the rescue of the Devas when, in the final battle, the Daityas took advantage of their power to create illusions which the Devas could not overcome.

Now this intervention on behalf of the Devas was not due to favouritism but because the Devas tried to follow the Divine Law and sought Divine guidance whenever they were in difficulty. Vishnu merely symbolizes Divinity and Divine forces naturally help those who follow the Divine Law of Righteousness and are guided by Divine Wisdom. We should be careful, however, not to interpret Divine Law and Divine guidance in the narrow, orthodox or worldly sense in which the leaders of a particular movement or religious organization assume the prerogative of interpreting the Divine Will according to their own predelictions and exploiting their followers for the purpose of promoting their personal interests or the interests of the sect or community to which they belong. Only those whose consciousness is in tune with Divine consciousness can really know the Divine Will with certainty. But those who have pure and unselfish motives and want earnestly to be enlightened can also get Divine inspiration and enlightenment through their intuition. For, Vishnu really represents Divine Wisdom, and Buddhi or intuition is the instrument through which alone an aspirant can put himself in touch with this Divine Wisdom for guidance in his life.

The primary condition for gaining such inspiration and guidance is a pure and unselfish heart and the determination to do always what one considers right and in harmony with the Divine Law. These sublime facts of spiritual life have been so much debased, by those who profess to be spiritual without having any real spirituality, into mere religious slogans and pious platitudes that one feels hesitation in talking about these things. But there is a tremendous reality hidden behind this doctrine of Divine guidance and Divine intervention.

5. The last point we may note in the story of the Churning of the Ocean is the question of the qualifications which entitle an aspirant to gain Enlightenment or Immortality. *Amrita* which is a symbol of Immortality is the last product of the churning and bringing it out was the main purpose of churning the Ocean. This is the most significant aspect of the story and we should consider it carefully to grasp its importance. Broadly it symbolizes the fact that the real purpose of the evolutionary process is to enable each individual to unfold the powers which are latent in him and to attain Self-realization. But the significance of the story is not only in the fact that the process of churning the Ocean culminates in bringing out amrita. It also lies in the fact that although both the Devas and the Daityas seek Immortality only the Devas are able to achieve it. Both co-operate and work together closely for the common

objective until they have almost reached it. And then in the last step although they have striven for it equally, the Daityas miss the coveted prize which passes to the Devas owing to Divine intervention and help.

How truly this part of the allegory depicts the race for Immortality between the followers of the Right-hand path and the Left-hand path will be seen by anyone who is familiar with the technique and conditions for treading the path which leads to Enlightenment and Liberation. The followers of both the paths tread the same road of evolution from the beginning. Even in the human kingdom their paths are common up to a fairly advanced stage of development. In fact the followers of the two paths are hardly distinguishable from each other when they are developing their emotional and mental faculties. They may even enter the path of inner unfoldment together and travel some distance together. But it is here that their paths divide and begin to diverge. The followers of the Right-hand path choose the path of purification, elimination of selfishness and development of love and compassion. They seek Divine guidance in their individual life, try to merge their personal will with the Will of God and aspire to become one with Him. The followers of the Left-hand path ignore these qualifications which are required for treading the path safely, and without purifying their lower nature and making it subordinate to their Higher Self enter the path of inner development. They thus enter the danger zone in which the clouding of the Buddhic faculty takes place and the power of discrimination is gradually lost. A man in this state of mind is unable to distinguish between right and wrong, between selfishness and spirituality, between the inflation of the lower ego and rear spiritual power. He may be dimly aware in the earlier stages of thus going off the track, of the undesirable consequences of compromises with evil and the laxity of moral discipline, but the voice of conscience is soon silenced and ceases to warn the unwary pilgrim on the path of personal ambition and selfish pursuit of power. He has entered the Left-hand path and forfeited the right to gain Immortality even though this is his birthright. He will have to come back to the right road, it may be after many lives of suffering and frustration, before he can tread the Right-hand path which leads ultimately to Enlightenment and Immortality.

Of course this failure to comply with the rigorous conditions of the Right-hand path does not necessarily mean treading the Left-hand path. In the lower stages of development this deviation may mean only sliding back into the ordinary worldly life and plunging with greater zest into its pleasures and pursuits. But if the aspirant is ambitious, has advanced some distance along the path of inner unfoldment and especially if he has gained some experience of the lower psychic powers he is likely to pass unconsciously into the Left-hand path and to

become more and more individualistic and power-hungry. All the three lower worlds are then open to him for conquest and only the entrance to the higher spiritual worlds remains barred. This door can open only to admit those who bring with them a pure and loving heart and who are prepared to merge their personal will in the Divine Will.

The story not only points out that those who do not conform strictly to the, rigorous code of conduct and unselfish life demanded by true Occultism lose the opportunity of reaching the goal of Enlightenment but also hints at the type of temptations which make the unwary and unqualified pilgrim on the path to go off the track. As we have seen already, when the Daityas got hold of the jar containing *amrita* and had only to take the last step of drinking the *amrita*, the Lord assumed the form of an exquisitely beautiful damsel to infatuate them and thus make them forget their purpose and voluntarily give up the opportunity and advantage they had gained. Anyone who knows the relation of the function of Divine life symbolized by Vishnu with Buddhi, his instrument, will see at once how apt the allegory is. If we do not have the necessary qualifications, we leave the path which leads to Enlightenment not by the intervention of any external agency but owing to the infatuations and illusory ambitions which arise in our own mind as a result of the weaknesses and unhealthy conditions prevailing therein. The infatuation need not necessarily take the form of sexual attraction. It can find expression in so many other ways depending upon the weak points in our character. Whatever the nature of the aberration which makes us go off the track, the result in every case is the same, namely loss of the opportunity to gain the supreme prize of human evolution when that prize may be almost within our grasp. For this kind of fall from the position that has been gained is possible not only for the neophyte but even for those who have gone far along the path. Even the Yogis in the highest stages of development are tempted by the Higher Powers and can fall from those dizzy heights if they have latent within their character, weaknesses and undesirable tendencies which can be aroused by external stimulus. It is only a perfectly pure heart and an attitude of complete self-surrender and dependence upon God which enables us to tread the path safely and entitles us to gain Divine protection and Divine help when we tend to stray from it. For it is a law of the spiritual life that those who have surrendered themselves to God and depend upon Him completely always remain under His protection and are brought back to the right path when they have strayed from it, even though this may cause them much suffering. This is the essential attitude and trait of character which distinguishes the Devas from the Daityas in the Puranic stories. The Devas also make mistakes, are subject to weaknesses for which they have to suffer. But their motive is right and they always turn to God for help in their difficulties. The Daityas on the other hand, once

they come into power, forget wherefrom they derive their power and set themselves against the Divine Will and the Divine forces working for evolution.

What has been said in the previous paragraphs should not discourage the aspirant. Rather it should hearten him and give him great courage and confidence in tackling the problem of his spiritual unfoldment. It should make him redouble his efforts to remove all his weaknesses and perfect the attitude of self-surrender to God. For those who are really pure, humble, unselfish and devoted to God there is nothing to fear anywhere at any time. These are not pious platitudes of the so-called religious life, but immutable laws of the inner life of the Spirit.

In this chapter only a few features of the story of the Churning of the Ocean have been dealt with. Those who are interested in this subject can read the story in detail and discover for themselves various other points of interest and the important lessons which it serves to convey.

CHAPTER IX

THE ALLEGORY IN DURGA-SAPTASHATI

WE have already discussed two allegories throwing some light on different aspects of human life. Let us now consider another important allegory in the Puranas which gives in a veiled form some important truths connected with man's spiritual life, i.e. with his relation to God and the struggle to find God within himself. This allegory is contained in *Durga-Saptashati*, a book which is known all over India. *Durga-Saptashati* is part of the *Markandeya-Purana* and contains 700 verses. It is generally used in the invocation of *Shakti* or Divine Power for help in removing different kinds of difficulties which beset human beings, individually or collectively, or in gaining some object which the worshipper desires for his personal satisfaction. The proper recitation of the whole book accompanied by a ritual is believed to produce remarkable results in achieving one's aim owing to the influx of Divine Power and a large number of Hindus have recourse to this method whenever they are in trouble owing to illness, lack of money or some other calamity. The question whether the use of a book of this nature in this manner is desirable or justifiable from the spiritual point of view need not be considered here. Even a cursory study of the book leaves no doubt in the mind of the reader that the invocation of Divine Power even for gaining ordinary worldly ends is not only allowed but encouraged in this book.

We are not concerned here with this aspect of the book. Our object in this chapter is to show, if possible, that the whole book is an allegory describing the different stages in the spiritual unfoldment of man and hinting that the invocation and descent of Divine Power from within his own heart enables an aspirant to overcome his weaknesses and difficulties and advance further at different stages of his progress. The idea that the story given is an allegory is not new. Many students who have studied the book carefully and tried to go deeper into its meaning have sensed the fact that the story is not to be taken literally but has a deeper meaning bearing on the struggle which is going on all the time between forces which help the advance of man towards his goal and those which retard or block his progress. Some have even tried to correlate different features of the story with the stages of development which they indirectly indicate. But this has been done in a rather sketchy manner and has not been able to bring out fully the allegorical nature of the whole story. This kind of work will require very careful analysis of the whole story, discovering the inner significance of its various parts and their relation with the well-known stages in the unfoldment of human consciousness, both

in its individual and collective aspects. In this chapter we cannot do more than point out a few salient features of the story.

Before we take up the question of the allegorical significance of *Durga-Saptashati* it is necessary to give a sketch of the story which forms its basis.

A king named Suratha is deprived of his kingdom by the machinations of his ministers and a Vaishya (merchant) named Samadhi is driven out of his home by his ungrateful wife and children. Both of them feel very unhappy and go to the hermitage of a sage named Medha to seek consolation. There they ask the sage why people in this world remain attached even to those things which are the cause of their misery. The sage replies that there is nothing to be surprised at in this universal phenomenon of human life. The Divine Power which lies at the basis of this Universe can cast a veil of *Maya* (illusion) even over the minds of those who are learned. It is this power of *Mahamaya* (the Great Illusion) which involves human beings in the circuit of *samara* (transmigratory experience) and results in their remaining attached even to those things which are a source of misery to them. The king then asks several questions about this Divine Power. Who is She? Where does She come from? How does She work?

In his reply the sage describes the nature of this Universal Divine Power or Durga and then proceeds to narrate for the benefit of Suratha and Samadhi a story describing the recurrent appearance of the Devi to help the Devas and destroy the Daityas. We shall uniformly refer to this Divine Power as the Devi although different names are used at different places in the book.

The purpose of Her recurrent appearance in the world is best given in a nutshell in the last two lines of the eleventh chapter where the Devi promises to appear and help the Devas whenever they are overpowered by the forces of evil. The reader will see in these two lines an almost exact reproduction of the idea in the well-known stanza (IV. 7) of the *Bhagavad-gita*. The story in *Durga-Saptashati* may therefore be considered as an illustration and elaboration of this idea or promise, given in these two books, of Divine intervention when the affairs of humanity go seriously wrong and threaten to get out of control.

Durga-Saptashati contains thirteen chapters and is divisible into three parts dealing with three separate appearances of the Devi on three different occasions. The story in the first part relates to the period after a *pralaya* (dissolution) when there was no creation. At that time when Vishnu was asleep (i.e. His consciousness was drawn inwards) two Daityas, named Madhu and Kaitabha were born from His ear-wax and threatened to devour Brahma the Creator. Brahma in His desperation prayed to Yoga-Nidra, the special Power of Vishnu which functions during the period of dissolution to wake up the Lord, and make Him destroy these

two Daityas who threatened His life. When Vishnu woke up He began to fight with the Daityas with His bare hands. But when He was not able to kill them even after five thousand years He used His power of illusion as a result of which the arrogant Daityas said to Vishnu: "We are very with your valour. Ask for a boon from us," Vishnu replied: "If you are pleased to give a boon then submit to being killed by me." Being thus caught in a trap they thought they could yet escape death by laying down a condition which was impossible to fulfil for there was nothing but the Ocean all round. So they said: "But You will have to kill us on dry land." Whereupon Vishnu took both of them on His thighs and cut off their heads. According to the second story a Daitya called Mahishasura was born at one time and became so powerful that he drove out all the Devas from Heaven and became the lord of all the three worlds. He oppressed the Devas so much that they went in a body under the leadership of Brahma to Vishnu and Shiva. On hearing the complaint of the Devas, Vishnu and Shiva became very angry and as a result of this a light came out from their bodies and that of the other Devatas. All these lights combined and took the form of a Devi whose radiance filled the whole Universe. Each of the Devatas then presented to this Devi a weapon or an ornament as a gift. After the Devi had been equipped in this manner, She began to produce a tremendous sound which filled all space.

On hearing this sound Mahishasura gathered his hosts and rushed towards its source. When he reached the spot, he saw the Devi standing there with arms extending in all directions and holding all kinds of weapons. The Daityas immediately attacked the Devi and the battle began. The narrative then describes in colourful language how fiercely the Daityas fought, how all the breaths of the Devi were transformed into fighters fully equipped with all kinds of weapons and the battle raged until the Daitya army was routed. When Mahishasura saw that his army was being routed he took the form of a buffalo (from which the name Mahishasura is derived) and rushed towards the Devi. When She saw Mahishasura coming towards Her, She threw Her lasso round his neck and tied him down. Thereupon Mahishasura took the forms of different animals, one after another, and ultimately a form with the upper part of a human being and the lower part of a buffalo. When the Daitya was undergoing this transformation the Devi transfixed him with Her lance and cut off his head. The remaining Daityas ran away to Patala (the nether world) and the Devatas and sages rejoiced, worshipped the Devi and sang a hymn in Her praise. When the Devi asked them what they wanted, they said: "By killing Mahishasura you have already ended our misery. But if you want to grant us a boon, then, O Mother! be pleased to appear and remove our difficulties whenever we remember you in our distress. And may those who invoke you through this hymn obtain what

they desire for their welfare." The Devi granted their prayer and disappeared. Thus ends the second part of the story.

The third part of the story which is the longest and most important from the allegorical point, of view deals with the appearance of the Devi for the destruction of the two Daityas, Shumbha and Nishumbha. These also became very powerful, drove out the Devas from Heaven and started misusing their power more and more. The Devas remembered the promise that the Devi had given on the previous occasion and prayed to Her to come and put an end to their misery. The Devi appeared in the form of Parvati and on learning why she had been invoked, a part of Her was projected outside in the form of a beautiful Devi called Ambika whereby Parvati was transformed into another Devi called Kalika who was black and ugly.

Two Daityas, called Chanda and Munda, saw Ambika and went and told Shumbha about her indescribable beauty. Thereupon Shumbha asked Sugriva, his attendant, to go immediately to Ambika and very tactfully persuade Her to become his consort. When Sugriva conveyed the message, Ambika replied: "I am under a vow. Only he who can conquer me in battle and thus destroy my egoism can be my Lord. If Shumbha wants me in marriage let him come and first defeat me in battle." When Shumbha heard the Devi's reply he became very angry and ordered Dhumra-lochana to go with an army and forcibly bring the Devi. A fierce battle followed in which Dhumra-lochana was killed and his army was completely routed. Another army was sent under the two Daityas, Chanda and Munda, but it met the same fate. Chanda was killed by the Devi by merely uttering the syllable *ham*. Then Shumbha ordered Rakta-bija to go with another large army. But before the battle began the Devi sent Shiva as a messenger to Shumbha and Nishumbha with the following offer: "If you want to live, return the kingdom of Heaven to the Devatas and return with all the Daityas to Patala. Otherwise you will be killed." The Daityas ignored this warning and immediately started fighting. Then followed a fierce battle in which all the Devatas sent their respective Powers to help the Devi, each Power having the same form as the corresponding Devata. The army of the Daityas was again routed and Rakta-bija was killed.

When Nishumbha, his own brother, was also killed, Shumbha, the king of the Daityas, himself came to the battlefield and started fighting with all kinds of weapons. When he found he could not do anything he taunted the Devi thus: "You are very proud of your valour but your success is due solely to the help you are getting from the other Powers." The Devi replied: "I am One. There is no one else besides me. Look! they are all my own expressions and I am taking them back into myself. I will now fight thee alone." When She said this all the Powers which had been sent to Her by the different Devatas disappeared and the Devi was

left alone. Then followed an individual battle between the Devi and Shumbha in which all kinds of weapons were used. But ultimately even weapons were discarded and the fight went on with fists, etc. In the last stage of this fight Shumbha jumped up and vent into the *Akasha* (sky) and the fight went on until he was killed.

When the Daityas were finally defeated the Devatas offered to the Devi one of the most beautiful and philosophically profound hymns, perhaps the best in the whole book. This hymn throws light on the different aspects of Divine Power in its philosophical and religious aspects and raises the heart of the devotee to the highest state of exaltation. The tone of the hymn also shows that the attitude of the Devas had been raised from the personal to the universal level. After the hymn the Devi promised to appear and destroy the forces of evil whenever this was necessary, made a few predictions, and disappeared.

Thus ends the story narrated by the great sage Medha before Suratha and Samadhi. The sage advised them to take refuge in the same Divine Power to get rid of the illusions and consequent attachments. After hearing this story both of them realized the futility of pining for the world and its enjoyments and decided to retire to the banks of a nearby river and perform *tapasya* (austerities) so that they could also get a vision of the Devi. When they had completed their *sadhana* and were ready, the Devi appeared before them and asked them what they wanted. Suratha who had lost his kingdom prayed that he might be helped to regain it and rule over it without attachment. Samadhi wanted nothing except *Moksha* or Liberation. The prayers of both were granted by the Devi and She then disappeared.

Thus ends the story of *Durga-Saptashati* in its external aspect. Anyone who reads it can see easily that it is an allegorical presentation of some truths and without such inner significance it would be a meaningless mythological story with no relation to the facts of real life. But while this will be clear it will not be easy to decipher the allegory and correlate it with the truths which it seeks to convey.

Those who have some knowledge of the different stages in the unfoldment of human consciousness will see immediately that the story in *Durga-Saptashati* seeks to give in an allegorical form the liberation of human consciousness from the illusions, limitations and attachments of the lower worlds. These limitations and illusions are a necessary part of the evolutionary process through which the embryonic soul has to pass before it is fit to undertake the struggle with these limitations and illusions and to realize its true Divine nature which leads to its Liberation. The *jivatma* (individual soul) is essentially Divine but in its descent into the lower worlds of manifestation loses the awareness of its Divine nature and its evolution in these worlds takes place in a state of spiritual darkness. When, as a result of

having reached a fairly high stage of mental development and maturity, it is fit to enter the field of spiritual evolution it faces its first difficulty on this path. The personality, through the instrumentality of which this spiritual evolution has to take place, is cut off from its Divine source and is not even aware that it has a Divine origin and a Divine destiny to fulfil. Its Buddhi or intuition has not begun to function, *viveka* (discrimination) is not yet born and so in spite of its readiness for the higher stages of evolution and in spite of the intellect being highly developed, the spiritual soul remains imprisoned within the unenlightened and wayward personality and there is no means of redeeming it. Two dangers especially threaten it: the eternal pursuit of pleasure and power by the personality. It is under these conditions of spiritual *pralaya* that the Higher Mind which is a bridge between the lower and the Higher Self appeals to the Universal Wisdom represented by Vishnu to enlighten the personality and thus make spiritual evolution possible.

The first part of the story obviously represents this stage. Brahma who symbolizes the Universal Mind and is represented by the Higher mind in the microcosm prays to Vishnu to destroy the two enemies, Madhu and Kaitabha. The awakening of Vishnu is obviously the birth of discrimination in the personality. When the light of Buddhi irradiates the mind it destroys complacence and makes even the personality see partially the illusions and limitations of ordinary human life and the urgent necessity of unfolding the spiritual nature. The way is thus opened for the higher stages of evolution and the redemption of the *jivatma*.

One interesting and significant point in this part of the story is that it is the two enemies of Brahma, Madhu and Kaitabha, who in their infatuation ask Vishnu to request them for a boon, and thus bring about their own destruction. Does not the lower mind or the lower self in man open the door for discrimination by directing its attention to the higher spiritual worlds in the hope of gaining subtle pleasures and greater powers? It is a common experience that people do not generally enter the path of spiritual unfoldment directly. They are gradually lured into it by the desire of gaining and enjoying the pleasures and powers of the subtler worlds—in the heaven of the orthodox religious people, or by developing psychic powers. This inquiry into the nature of the higher worlds and desire to gain their experiences makes the lower self submit to increasing self-discipline and purification and thus opens the mind to discrimination. And when real discrimination appears it destroys not only the desire for the pleasures and powers of the lower life but also those of the subtler worlds. The desire to find that Reality which transcends the phenomenal world, replaces all other desires. We thus see how the desire for pleasure and power by taking a subtler form brings about its own

destruction and it is this phenomenon which is symbolized by the destruction of Madhu and Kaitabha by Vishnu.

After discrimination has developed to an adequate degree and spiritual evolution has been made possible the first great difficulty which appears in the path of the aspirant is the lower self with all its animal propensities and undesirable tendencies of the lower mind. For, ordinarily, discrimination gives only perception and not control, and when the aspirant begins to feel the need for changing his life and treading the path but finds the lower self with all its ingrained lower desires and tendencies blocking his way, the struggle between the lower and the Higher self in man begins. And it is a struggle of a various character in which he has to fight on many fronts at the same time and requires different kinds of faculties and powers. In the early stages when his pride and egoism are still strong he depends solely upon his own mental powers to fight this multi-front battle. But he soon realizes that though this struggle requires self-confidence and self-reliance success cannot be achieved without invoking his spiritual powers which are still latent in him. So with the help of the Higher mind, under the guidance of which he is carrying on this work of unfoldment, he invokes these latent spiritual powers and faculties and gradually learns to utilize them in this difficult struggle with his lower nature. And it is only when these spiritual powers come to his aid that he begins to gain ascendency over the lower self. True Self-reliance is not reliance on the lower self but upon the Divine Self who is present in the heart of every human being. The battle is long lasting and sometimes fierce but if the aspirant perseveres and does not lose his faith in the Divine Power within him the lower self is ultimately vanquished and ceases to be an obstruction in his path. He has still many hurdles to cross, many subtler enemies to conquer but he has been able to eliminate those *tamasic* (passive) tendencies which resist all his efforts to bring about the required transformations within himself.

The story of Mahishasura depicts in an allegorical form this phase of our spiritual development. The following points will show its allegorical nature.

In the first place, the Devas go to Vishnu and Shiva under the leadership of Brahma and pray for, deliverance from the tyranny of Mahishasura. This is an allegorical method of pointing out that the aspirant is still in the realm of the intellect to a great extent and has not yet unfolded his spiritual faculties. No direct access to the spiritual or Divine world is possible for him and it is under the inspiration and guidance of the Higher mind that this effort to arouse his spiritual faculties is made. The response from the spiritual realms hidden within the heart of the aspirant to a sincere cry for help is certain and results in the gradual awakening of the spiritual consciousness and the powers which accompany this awakening. These different

kinds of powers which are merely differentiated forms of the One Supreme Power are needed at this stage because of the multifarious nature of the task which has to be accomplished and also because the aspirant is not yet sufficiently developed to utilize Spiritual Power in its undifferentiated form. It is through this composite, non-specific spiritual power working in different spheres, which is shown in the allegory to be derived from the different Devatas, that the lower self is conquered and the way is opened for spiritual unfoldment.

Two significant features of this part of the story may be noted. The first is the different forms which Mahishasura assumes in fighting the Devi before he is finally transfixed by Her lance and killed. He takes the forms of a buffalo, a lion and an elephant in succession which no doubt symbolize the different animal tendencies in man. The human form which finally comes out of the animal form is obviously the lower mind in its earlier stages of development when it is merely an instrument of the lower desires and refuses to be an instrument of the Higher Self.

The second important point we may note here is the promise which the Devi gives to the Devas to appear before them whenever they remember and invoke Her in their difficulties. This symbolizes the fact that after the death of the lower self the aspirant is in a position to approach his Higher Self directly and to get help from within whenever he asks for it. This capacity to obtain guidance and help directly from one's Higher Self marks a definite stage in spiritual development and is indispensable for treading the path of Higher Yoga. As we have seen in the allegory this privilege is gained only after the death of the lower self, or rather its subservience to the Higher Self. When the lower nature in man has been controlled and purified and serves merely as an instrument of the Higher Self the lower self may be said to be dead.

The third part of the story is the longest and the most important from the point of view of its spiritual significance. This is to be expected because real spiritual unfoldment begins only when the light of Buddhi or discrimination steadily irradiates the mind and the lower nature of the aspirant has been completely subjugated. The first two stages merely prepare the ground for the real work which is to follow in the third stage.

This story again begins with the invocation of Divine Power by the Devas although the enemies on this occasion are different and the invocation of the Divine Power is direct. The Daityas against whom help is now sought are the ‘enemies’ who beset the path of the Yogi in the higher stages of his spiritual unfoldment. Let us consider a few salient features of this part of the story.

The desire of Shumbha to win the Devi as his queen when he heard of Her beauty hints at the danger which lurks in the path of a Yogi when he enters the higher levels of consciousness where spiritual power can be acquired. If there is any ambition latent in him this is likely to be aroused and he will then be tempted to grasp and use this spiritual power for his individual satisfaction and glorification. It is this subtlest kind of egoism and ambition which find expression on the highest levels that is symbolized by Shumbha, and the Devi's vow in the story merely points out that only he who has been able to destroy this egoism can use the spiritual power. If the Yogi yields to the temptation and tries to gain this power while his ego is still active he comes in conflict with the Power and fights until the egoism is destroyed. If his discrimination is sufficiently developed and he does not yield to the temptation he still needs the help of that Power for transcending the illusion which is the cause of this subtlest kind of egoism. So in both cases it is the Supreme Spiritual Power which destroys the ego and liberates the Yogi from this illusion of *samsara* (material existence). It is this ‘I’, the spiritual ego which gives a sense of *asmita* (separate existence) that really encloses or circumscribes the centre of Divine Consciousness and the destruction of the ‘I’ means the disappearance of the circumference leaving only the Centre.

Before the destruction of the ‘I’ consciousness can take place many other tendencies which block the progress of the Yogi and which are sometimes referred to as ‘fetters’ must be eliminated. These are symbolized in the story by those Daityas whom Shumbha sent with an army to fight the Devi before he himself came to the battlefield. They have been given names such as Dhumra-lochana, Chanda-Munda and Rakta-bija which are significant. We could try to correlate these names with particular tendencies referred to above but it is better not to enter this controversial ground. For, ideas regarding the nature of these tendencies and the names used for them differ in different systems of Yoga although they succeed in bringing about the same result ultimately. So we should be content here with the general statement that in his progress towards the goal of Liberation or Enlightenment different kinds of subtle undesirable tendencies which bar the path of the Yogi come up and are destroyed by the Divine Power working within him. When he is free from these tendencies he is ready for the final struggle in which his ego is liquidated and he stands free with his consciousness united with the Divine Consciousness. It is only then that he can become an instrument through which true Spiritual Power can work for carrying out the Divine Will. This is what the Devi means when, in reply to the overtures of Shumbha, She says: “I can give my hand only to him who conquers me by superior power.”

The second interesting point in the third part of the story is the use of certain sounds by the Devi in killing certain Daityas. The use of *mantras* or particular combinations of sounds in spiritual unfoldment is well known. These *mantras* or mystic syllables are frequently utilized in Yogic practice for removing, certain tendencies or unfolding certain states of consciousness. Besides this, certain sounds or combinations of sounds are used at the time of initiations to bring about a temporary expansion of consciousness. But, naturally all these things are kept strictly secret and no one can know them until he is ready for the particular stage of development.

Then we come to another significant feature of the story. It will be remembered that after Chanda-Munda were killed another army was sent by Shumbha under the command of Rakta-bija. But before the battle began all the Devatas sent their specific Powers to help the Devi in her fight with the Daityas. On this occasion, however, the Powers retain their separate identity and do not coalesce as on the previous occasion when Mahi-shasura was killed. What does this signify? That it is only in the third stage after the lower self has been completely mastered and some other tendencies have been removed that the Yogi is in a position to develop and utilize the Yogic powers or *siddhis* which are mentioned in Yogic literature. He has not to depend only upon the general and non-specific Power which was at his disposal up to this time. As is well known, it is only after the disciple has reached a certain stage of spiritual development that he is allowed to develop Yogic Powers systematically in the *Sadhana-Chatushtaya* or the fourfold discipline for Liberation.

It is also worth noting in this connection that the Devi gives to Shumbha the option to retire to the nether regions after restoring the kingdom of Heaven to the Devas. This means that it is dot necessary for the Yogi to proceed to the last step which means the destruction of his 'I' and liberation. He can retain his separate identity and the use of the lower *siddhis* if he so desires. But if he wants Liberation and the Supreme Spiritual Bower which accompanies Liberation then his separate identity or ego must disappear. There is no other way.

The description given in the *Durga-Saptashati* of the final battle of the Devi with Shumbha throws some light on the manner in which the destruction of the 'I' or the ego takes place. The withdrawal by the Devi of all Her different forms into Herself represents the fact that in the last stages of the destruction of the ego which takes place before Self-realization it is the Spiritual Power in its purity which is functioning and not any one of its differentiated forms. The struggle has been shifted to the highest or subtlest level and this is to be expected. This is also indicated by the statement that Shumbha goes into *Akasha* to give battle to the Devi in the last resort. *Akasha* is the subtlest of the *pancha-tattvas* (five elements) in which the

manifested world functions and the statement that the last stage of the battle is fought in *Akasha* obviously means that the 'I' of the Yogi is attenuated progressively and it must be reduced to its subtlest form before it can be eliminated.

The last point we may note in this allegory is the significance of the difference in the boons granted by the Devi to Suratha and Samadhi. This no doubt hints at the existence of the two paths which are open to the Self-realized Yogi after attaining Liberation. One path leads back to the world he has transcended and he carries on the Divine work in the lower worlds and helps his brethren who are still struggling in the realms of illusion and limitations. The other path takes him out of the lower worlds of manifestation to do some work in the spiritual realms about which we can have no conception.